



Once you've spent a
second of your life
you can never take
it back. More than
anything, Adam
Carter wishes that
he could.

The Life and Loves of Adam Carter:
A journal of my senior year
[A novel for teenagers]

John Hammond with Cary Hutchison

**The Life and Loves
of
Adam Carter:**

A journal of my senior year

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**with
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My Journal, *Adam Carter*

AUGUST

SATURDAY, AUGUST 6TH

I've heard that the bad things that happen to you eventually seem less and less bad as time passes. It's been a week - eight days to be exact - and I don't feel any better. If anything, I feel worse the longer I have to think about it.

I suppose as younger brothers go, Davy has really never been all that bad. I treated him like he was - that's what older brothers do, I guess. I know that brothers disagree and yell and fight. I've pounded on him sometimes for no really good reason other than that he was just so handy when I was mad about something. I always figured that's what little brothers were for. Mostly though, I think we've got along pretty good - been pretty close. Shared stuff that happened to us. Planned about the future. Talked about growing up stuff, girls, things like that. This was supposed to be our big year together on the football field. It was supposed to be me starting at defensive back and Davy starting as a sophomore at running back. Dad was so proud. One or the other of his sons would be in on just about every play.

Now it can't be that way, of course. If I could just take back ten seconds of my life all this would be so different. I've replayed it over and over in my head. I have nightmares about it. I was the one who deserved to get hurt. I was the one who let my anger at him get out of control. I didn't mean to hurt him so bad. Really, I didn't. But, I did want to hurt him and that was wrong. So, like I said, it should have been me not him.

It's so vivid in my mind and I can't get rid of it. He stole the girl he knew I wanted. I can't remember ever being so mad at anybody before. I had the perfect way to get back at him. In practice, where we always went up against each other, I'd punish him on every play. That's just how the scrimmage was going last Friday afternoon. I bested him every time, dropping him onto his back and driving my cleats into his stomach and other places no guy wants to feel cleats. After thirty minutes, I'd worn him down, but he kept coming back - Davy has never been a quitter.

I remember the puzzled look on his face the last time we lined up. Davy was wide right and I was just off the line waiting to get my hands on him. He didn't say anything, but I could tell he couldn't understand what was going on. I figured there would be plenty of time to explain later. It was those next ten seconds I wish I had back.

"Hut, two, three!"

I was off the line like lightning. I stood him up and twisted him to the ground with all the power I could muster. I walked back to our huddle without even looking at him. I knew I'd got him good.

"Hey, Coach," somebody yelled. "Davy's hurt."

I felt myself smirking. I'd made my point. I'd lay off a bit after that. Coach Smith and the trainer pushed their way through the crowd of players that had gathered. I was the last to arrive and stood at the rear still rather proud of myself. I couldn't get a good view of what was going on.

"Get the paramedics out here ASAP," the trainer called out.

Then I heard the coach make the call on his cell phone. The guys all removed their helmets. Coach swished us back with his arms. The rest left to stand together some ten yards away. I moved forward, suddenly concerned. Davy was unconscious. His helmet was still on suggesting the trainer suspected a neck injury. I knelt beside him, suddenly horrified about it all - my anger, my plan to punish him, the helpless body of my only brother laying there motionless in the mud at the center of the field.

I said a silent prayer - quick and to the point - and then asked the trainer what I could do to help.

"Pray. He's really hurt."

"Done that. What else?"

"Very carefully take off his shoes while I cut his jersey away."

Coach Smith returned saying the ambulance was only minutes away. "They said to take vitals."

The trainer proceeded to do that. I knew enough from my medical procedures and CPR classes to see he was in very bad shape - his face was pale, his breathing shallow, his closed eyelids fluttered. Then it happened. He stopped breathing. The trainer and I immediately began administering CPR – he'd been my teacher. It was a dangerous procedure to use on a victim with suspected neck or back injury. Too much pressure and nerves could be severed. There was no alternative so we proceeded. Just as the ambulance screeched to a halt beside us, Davy took his first breath, then his second, and third and he was back breathing on his own. The trainer began providing the information to the Paramedics.

"I saw him fall. The back of his head took a brutal blow as he landed on the ground. The center of his back curled over somebody's helmet. He has remained unconscious. He stopped breathing. We did CPR. Just before his breathing problem began his pulse was rapid and his blood pressure was very low."

While one EMT repeated the examination and adjusted an oxygen mask over his mouth and nose, the other called in for instructions from a physician. His shoulder pads were cut away.

The initial plan called for him to be strapped to a back board and transported by ambulance to the hospital at Jacksonville some forty minutes away. Then, Davy went into cardiac arrest – his heart stopped. The plan changed. He responded to the first defibrillation. Ten minutes later the Medi-Vac helicopter arrived with a physician onboard. She quickly determined there was a spinal injury. They loaded him onto the helicopter.

"I'm going, too," I said pulling off my jersey – shoulder pads and all.

"Not allowed," the doctor said.

"You going to try and stop me?" I asked, more angrily than I had intended. I untangled my jersey from the pads and pulled it under my belt for later use.

"He's the boy's older brother," Coach explained.

I climbed aboard and no one made a move to make me leave. One of the attendants strapped me into a seat near Davy's head.

Taking off seemed to be permission for my tears to start flowing. I cried quietly not wanting Davy to hear, in case he was aware of what was going on. I moved my hand gently up and down his limp arm and began talking to him. I've been taught that was a good thing to do in case the patient could hear. You should say reassuring things. Things that explained what was happening without upsetting them.

"You got a bump on the head. We're getting a helicopter ride because of it. Everything is going to be fine. They just want to take you to a bigger hospital. About an hour's ride, so just take it easy. There's a doctor right here taking good care of you. She's pretty good looking considering her age"

We all saw the corner of his mouth turn up – just a bit – like he was smiling after what I had said. Of course, he had to take it easy. He couldn't move.

"That's good," the doctor said. "Keep talking."

So, I blabbered all the way to Hot Springs. I blabbered all the way from the helicopter into the hospital. I blabbered all the way down the hall to the examination room. Reluctantly, I agreed to stay outside. Suddenly, standing there in the waiting room, I felt very much alone - very sad - very terrified - and guiltier than I'd ever felt about anything in my life. I called my folks to fill them in. Coach had told them. Mom had already left by car but I still had three more hours to handle by myself.

Like I said, that was eight days ago. Davy's still down there in the hospital. Mom is staying with him. She calls us several times a day. He's finally regained consciousness, but he's paralyzed from the waist down. They don't know if it's permanent yet. I have to be the worst brother – the worst person – that ever lived. It's not getting better. It's not!

SATURDAY, AUGUST 13th

School started on Monday. I can't eat. I can't sleep. I can't concentrate in the classrooms. Whenever I'm alone I cry. None of that helps anything, of course, but I don't know what to do. At practice, I'm afraid to hit anybody. I'm really worried about how I'll ever be ready to play Friday night – I mean really ready to play. I used to love to hit. It's why I talked coach into switching me from running back my Junior year.

I haven't been to see Davy yet. That comes tomorrow – Sunday. Dad and I are driving down together. I haven't told anybody about . . . well, about that it is all my fault – that I wanted to hurt Davy, and that I set out to do just that. I've decided I need to tell him first. Everybody feels sorry for me, if you can believe that. I hate it when the guys pat me on the back or the girls hug me – both meaning they are sorry for me. I supposed the guys on the team and the coaches would have figured out something was going on between Davy and me at that practice, but nobody has said anything about it. If they know or even suspect something, I wish they'd just say so and get it out in the open.

I was talking with a girl before class today. Grace. I don't know her really well, but I think I'd like to. We're both in the same Computer Class. She's sweet and kind and beautiful, and when she patted my arm this morning it seemed like she had the softest hands I'd ever felt. She said I need to be strong for Davy and my parents. I know she's right. But I don't know how I'm going to pull it off. I've never seen pond scum that was really very strong, you know?

That's how I feel about myself - pond scum or whatever's lower than that. My grades were awful this week. Mr. Atherton said I could redo the algebra assignments after things got back to normal. He said he'd talk to my other teachers. It was nice of him – very thoughtful – but things are never going to get back to normal. Davy's going to hate me forever. My parents won't hate me, I suppose, but I'll never be able to look them in the eye again. I can't see how I'll ever be comfortable in my home anymore. How can I keep sharing a room with Davy?

I've decided I'll just take anything and everything he wants to dish out to me. He can yell and scream. He can call me all the four-letter word he wants to. He can pound on me – in fact, I really hope he will. I'll just take it and not say anything back. After all there probably aren't four letter words that are bad enough to describe me.

Somehow, I have to get back to doing my homework. Mom's been really vague about Davy's condition. Dad says it's probably because the doctors think it's too soon to draw any long-term conclusions. He still hasn't been able to wiggle his toes or move his legs or even feel a toothpick drawn across the sole of his foot. The way I understand it, the longer he's unable to move the less likely it is that he ever will move. I just want to go and hide, but I can't. I can sort of see how a person might come to consider killing himself when something comes up that makes him hate himself so much as this. I won't, of course. It's against the teachings of my church. But suddenly I can understand about that better than I used to. My parents and Davy have enough to deal with now. I wouldn't burden them with another tragedy.

Mom says that Davy asks about me every day. He's still too weak to speak out loud. I guess that's why he hasn't called. I suppose I should call or text him. I don't know what to say so I haven't. That's just selfish on my part, I suppose – I know. Dad has been making excuses for me. I'm sure Dad doesn't understand why I won't talk to him, but he hasn't asked.

What will I say to him on Sunday? "How's it goin' bro?" That would just be lame. "Want to dance?" "A heck of a way to get out of going to school." Both are humorous, but sick. "Sorry I ruined your life." At least that would be truthful even if still way too shallow. 'Sorry' hardly cuts it!

I guess I'll avoid the whole injury thing and just take him all the cards that have come to the house for him and tell him how everybody misses him and wishes him well. Can't really begin making plans yet – not until we know what lies ahead for him.

What will I say if he comes right out and asks me why I did it to him? "Because I'm ignorant." "Because I'm a horrible person." "Because I wanted to hurt you really, really, bad."

"To get back at you for stealing Amber from me and teach you to never try that again."

Maybe I can put it off until later. "I'll give you a full explanation after you're feeling better." That's no good. He deserves an honest answer just as soon as he asks for one. I have to come up with something. I can tell it will be another sleepless night. A month ago, my mission for my senior year was crystal clear. Help the Cougars win the conference title. Maintain at least a 3.0 in my school work. Get a girlfriend – I mean a fall head over heels in love, learn to kiss in ways never before known to mankind, and spend all my free time with her, girlfriend. But now. I'm having a hard time seeing how any of that is very important compared to Davy having a full recovery.

I can't undo what I did. I can't get those ten seconds back. Once you spend a second of your life it's gone forever. I've learned that I need to spend my seconds wisely from now on. What I can do is take care of him for as long and in any ways that he needs taking care of. I can tell him that. I've done lots of unpleasant things to him in his life, but I've never lied to him. He'll believe me when I say that. It should make him feel better – shouldn't it? I don't know. I've never been this confused before – about me or about life.

It's late. I'm tired. I'll read in my Bible a while. That usually helps me settle down. Staying exhausted isn't going to help anybody. Dad's been doing everything around here this week. I should be helping. I'll get up early and do the laundry. I'll fix us a good breakfast before we take off for Hot Springs. I'll pick up my room and the living room. That will be helpful and I think being helpful is probably one thing that will make me feel better. Grandma used to say that when she was feeling down, she'd go do something nice for somebody else and it always made her feel better. Thanks Grandma. I'm going to give your way a try.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20TH

Last Sunday was the most terrifying and yet the most wonderful day in my life – I think. It didn't go at all like I had figured it would. If I learned anything I suppose it was not to

undersell the power of love.

I got up early and had the laundry done and the whole house picked up before Dad rolled out. While he showered, I got us breakfast. It really did make me feel better – being useful that way.

By seven we were pulling out of the driveway. Dad asked me if I'd drive. I wasn't sure if that was because he was tired or if he thought I needed to keep my mind occupied during the three-hour ride. I haven't done much long trip, highway driving, so it was a good experience – fun, even. Dad said I did a good job. When Dad praises you, you know it's real. He doesn't just hand it out like rice at a wedding.

We were parked and at the front desk at ten sharp. I had set my watch and it beeped as a very attractive girl in a very unattractive red and white striped dress gave us directions to Davy's room. Dad had called Mom a few minutes earlier to let her know we'd arrived safely. Davy had been moved out of intensive care into a private room on the fifth floor.

We entered the elevator and I punched the big, white five button. As the doors slid closed my mouth went dry. My heart started beating rapidly. I felt cold. I couldn't catch my breath. I wanted to cry, but didn't. Dad sensed my problem.

"I know. It'll be hard, Son. Davy needs us to be strong. Your mother needs us to be strong. Put on a smile and prepare a few wisecracks. You've always been the one in our family that could make us laugh when things looked bad."

No pressure there, now, was there! I'd just been put in charge of holding the whole darn family together. The doors opened. I didn't want to get out. Dad turned and looked at me from the hallway, a question on his face. I took a deep breath and followed him. The clicking of the doors closing behind me felt like the final closing of a cell door on death row. I was sure the life I'd always known was about to change forever – in the worst of all possible ways. I would lose my parents' respect and my brother's love. Worse still, I deserved both. The moment I'd seen Davy lying lifeless in the mud, I lost all respect for myself. I guess the next few minutes would make that unanimous within my family.

It was a small room with a large wall to wall window on

one side. The heavy green drapes were pulled back and the sun streamed in making it a rather pleasant place, I suppose. There were three chairs – one a recliner where I suspected Mom spent most of her time.

Dad entered first and squeezed Mom's hands giving her a gentle peck on her lips. Then he went immediately to the bed leaning down and giving Davy a lingering, gentle, hug, and a kiss to his forehead. Davy was all smiles. I hugged Mom waiting for my, dreaded, turn to approach Davy. I expected folded arms and a head turned away from me in full out rejection. I got neither.

He reached up and pulled me close. We both cried and I stayed there, supporting my own weight so not to hurt him in any way. When at last I stood back up Mom was there with a box of tissues. All four of us were in need.

"So, what some guys won't do to get out of going to school," I said even though I'd dismissed it as inappropriate days earlier.

"I'm not supposed to laugh. Jiggles my risibles or some such thing. It's sure good to see you. Why haven't you called?"

"Figured you needed your rest. Didn't want to disturb you. Actually, I was just chicken. Afraid I wouldn't know what to say."

"You! Not know what to say. Fat chance of that."

He smiled. I could tell he was really glad to see me. I couldn't understand why. It was time to deal with things. I asked Mom and Dad to leave us alone – "Go get coffee or whatever." They seemed pleased to have been given a few minutes together and were immediately gone.

"Can I sit beside you on the bed or will that damage those risibles you need to protect?"

He patted the bed and I sat – one knee up on the bed and the other leg dangling to the floor. I didn't know how to begin. I didn't have to.

"So, I suppose you're thinking this is all your fault," Davy said, "And you've been having humongous guilt feelings, sleepless nights, and such," he started. "You must have lost ten pounds. You look worse than I do! That's just stupid. I've figured out what you were doing at practice."

“You . . . have?” I said like it was a question.

“You were giving me the worst I’d ever be up against during the season so I could see how far I still had to go. Every time you dropped me I learned something – something not to do or something to do different. I figured after about a half dozen more plays I’d leave you in my dust. You always turn your head away from the direction of the arm you’re going to lead with. Gotta stop that or some smart running back like me will catch on and move right out of your grasp. Your hits were hard – hardest I’ve ever taken, but I took them all and came back for more. Well, until that last one. I understand I landed on a stray helmet and that’s what caused all this – the landing, NOT the hit.”

I wanted to cry but no tears would come. Davy always thought the best of other people no matter how obvious their bad intentions appeared to everybody else. He’d given me a way out and if I’d take it things would be fine between us. It was tempting, but it was wrong. It was my turn to talk.

“I’m glad it was a useful practice for you and thanks for the hint about my head. I’ll work on that.”

He nodded and smiled and reached out for my hand. I took it and probably squeezed it way too tight as I tried to continue.

“But, see, you got my motivation all wrong. I wasn’t trying to help you, Davy. I was trying to hurt you – to really hurt you. My anger about you taking Amber away from me just kept growing and growing and all I could think about was getting back at you. I figured doing it on the playing field was the ideal spot. Do you understand! I set out to hurt you, Davy, and I’m so sorry about it that I can’t find any words that can tell you.”

His face grew puzzled and then he frowned. Then he nodded suggesting he understood.

“You tried to punish the wrong guy, you know.”

“What?” He wasn’t making any sense.

“You asked her out and she turned you down – down flat is the way you put it, I believe. I figured that meant she was fair game. I have the idea you were madder at yourself for being rejected than you were at me for getting the date with her – it was just one stinkin’ little date you know. If it’s

any consolation she's a terrible kisser."

I felt myself sigh a huge, full out, from the bottom of my lungs, sigh. It was as if all my anger left with it. The guilt was another matter, but I'd work on that. I had not kissed Davy since Granny used to make us kiss and make up after fighting as preschoolers. But I needed to kiss him. I followed Dad's lead and placed a gentle one on his forehead.

"Thanks, but that will stay just between the two of us," he said, not really joking.

I nodded, again my mind blank with nothing to say. Mom and Dad returned. When Mom was in a room nobody had to worry about what to say. She was a World Class talker.

I still needed to face my parents about it all, but that was not the time.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27

Davy comes home tomorrow morning. He'll be transported by ambulance. Mom came home Friday afternoon and Dad went to stay at the hospital. It's really good to have her home. I had everything neat as a pin and was she surprised! It made her cry, but then women seem to cry about everything. Dad once told me it was best to just assume they were crying because they were happy. If they weren't they'd certainly let you know.

Davy insists he doesn't need anybody there with him. I'm afraid he'd bust a risible or two going after the nurses if one of our parents wasn't there to keep things cool. Davy has always liked girls. They've always liked him. Once he got sent home from kindergarten for charging girls a nickel apiece for him to kiss them. He emptied his pockets onto his bed that night and we counted up over two dollars. He does it for free, these days. (What a poor business man he's turned out to be!)

Our room's a little crowded. We have always shared bunk beds – him top, me bottom. Now we've had to make room for a hospital bed. I moved the old toy chest and the recliner to the attic. By rearranging the desks and making a

temporary place for our books on the lower bunk, we're going to be okay. The main problem will be bathing him, but we'll work that out some way.

The doctors say there is no problem about carrying him from place to place. When I was ten and he was eight I used to piggy back him all over the neighborhood. We may have to give that another try. I can just see it now – the two of us suited up, him on my back, running down the football field with him reaching up to bring in the pass while I sidestep the charging D-Back.

That thought really made me sad. It should have been humorous. I thought it would be humorous; but it made me sad.

I just have to put a fresh sheet on his bed and we'll be all set here in our room. Monday he'll start with a homebound tutor – well, the tutor isn't homebound. Davy is. Anyway, he starts Monday. Coach asked me if I wanted to play both ways – running back and defensive back. Fairview is a little school and we don't have much depth at any position. I asked Dad what he thought. He said it was my call. I'm going to talk it over with Davy once he gets settled in. I've been practicing both ways this week. It's sort of nice playing offense again. I guess I sort of miss it. Coach always thought it was my natural position. I've pretty much regained my drive to hit hard. Davy helped me a lot about that when he pointed out it wasn't the hit that hurt him; it was the landing. I love him so much.

I know that between schoolwork, football, and looking after him, there won't be much time for other stuff this year, but that's okay. I've got my head on straight about it and I can do it. There is Grace, though. I catch her looking at me sometimes. I'm sure she sees me looking at her, too. Some days we talk before class. Nothing big. Mostly just school stuff. She sure is pretty and nice. She seems to like me. I hope it's not just because she pities me about Davy.

I retook the quizzes and stuff that I did so badly on the first two weeks of school. I'm up over a 3.0 in everything now, so I'm confident about the schoolwork side of things.

Daunte came by this morning and helped me move the stuff upstairs. He's always been there for me. Just the right

kind of best friend – there when I need or want him, but never intrudes when I need my space. I've tried to be that way for him. I can see how it would be easy to get too possessive of a best friend, forgetting he has and needs a life that's separate from the times we share together.

Friday's the first game. It's against the Jacksonville Jackals. We play them twice this year – first game and last game. Not a good thing for us. We're the smallest school in the conference and they're the biggest. I keep hoping they'll move up to AAA but they always land right back here with us. They scouted us early, back when Davy was playing. Davy and I have really different running styles – he's shifty and moves quickly back and forth and sidesteps the defense. I run right at them – stiff arm at the ready and a shoulder just itchin' to punish them if they get too close. That may give us a little edge. It sounds like I've decided to do it – play offense as well.

Friday, Amber came up to me at noon and asked how Davy was doing. I felt comfortable talking with her. She said she'd call and come by to see him after he got home. That was nice of her. Everybody likes Davy. He'll have lots of visitors. While we were talking, I couldn't keep my eyes off her beautiful, full lips, wondering just how she could possibly be such an awful kisser with that kind of original equipment. I wondered if ever before in the history of the World a boy had wanted so much to kiss a girl just to find out how she could kiss so badly. I could smile at it, but I have to admit – I really do want to kiss her!

Mom seems exhausted. She and Dad have switched their shifts around at work so Dad works early mornings and she works noon to eight. That way we'll only need a 'baby sitter' for Davy a few hours every day. If he ever reads this and sees I said baby sitter I'll get the pounding of my life – and love it!

We're all tired, of course. It hasn't been easy on any of us. The ladies of the church have kept Dad and me supplied with tuna casseroles and other things to eat. (I may never look another noodle or chunk of pink tuna in the face again!) On the other hand, the apple pies and chocolate cakes have won a warm spot in my heart. Mom is taking off one more

week before going back to work.

Tomorrow evening after we get Davy settled in, the physical therapist will come by and begin teaching Dad and me how to do the exercises with him. That way she will only need to come once a week to check his progress instead of three times a day. Dad hasn't said but I imagine the medical bills are out of this World. Maybe I can get a part time job to help out.

That reminds me, he'll be wearing some kind of electrical, nerve stimulation, contraption on his butt – excuse me – his lower spinal area, so I need to run a heavy-duty extension cord over to his bed. I'll get that done now, then spend some time with the Good Book – I'm afraid I've been slacking off a little bit in that department.

SEPTEMBER

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 3RD

I don't know how Davy does it. If I were in his position, I'd be mad as h-e-double-hockey sticks, but he isn't. His spirits are better than any of the rest of us. If he can do something for himself, he won't let anybody else do it - no matter how long it takes him. That's often really inconvenient for the family – waiting on him to dress himself and such – but I say more power to him. I think we're all learning patience through this.

The physical therapist brought him some mini barbells so he can work out his upper body. Dad and I have both learned to do his leg massage and manipulations – moving them up and down and sideways and things like that. I do them before school, after school and in the evening. Dad does them when he gets home from work at noon. Sometime next week his electric wheelchair is supposed to get here. Then he can move about the place on his own. He can still only be in a sitting position for an hour at a time twice a day, but he really looks forward to those two hours.

He asked about making a ramp down off the back porch. I think he has his eye on the basketball court in the driveway. Like I said. His attitude is great. He's always been an independent so and so. I guess I shouldn't be surprised. The first day of kindergarten he still couldn't tie his shoes, but he wouldn't let any of us do it for him. He curled the strings into two loops and then scotch taped them in place. That didn't last long and within a few days he was willing to wear

the Velcro shoe solution that Mom had suggested. But it shows his determination to take care of himself.

His tutor comes for two hours, four times a week over the noon hour. That way somebody's here with him from the time Mom leaves until Dad gets home. He's a retired special education teacher and the two of them get along really well. On Fridays, when the tutor isn't here, Mrs. Stevens from next door comes over and stays in the house. The church ladies still bring in dinner three nights a week. They've broadened the menu to include fried chicken, pot roast, ham and steak. That's more like it. That sounded unkind and I didn't mean it that way. We all really appreciate their help. It's just that Davy and I appreciate it more when there is real meat involved instead of little chunks of pink fish hidden inside a mass of noodles looking ever so much like a colony of slimy white flat worms with bubble eyes waiting to attack. Hey. There just might be a story in that for my creative writing class!

School is going pretty good. Lots of kids still want daily updates on Davy's condition. Mom had to limit visitors to between four and five o'clock, otherwise the house would be full of kids all the time. Amber came by once. It was very uncomfortable for Davy and me. I think she got the idea. She hasn't been back. I'd still like to kiss her – just once.

No big surprise that we lost to Jacksonville last night - 24 to 20, closer than almost anybody predicted, actually. I got to throw an option pass that went for a touchdown. That was exciting. Their players are so big and strong. I'd guess they've been shaving since fourth grade. I had to always do ankle tackles because I couldn't get my arms around most of the running back's hips or thighs. Playing both ways exhausted me. My body paid the price. I stayed in the whirlpool for an hour after the game. Now Dad's not sure it's such a good idea. Davy thinks it's great. He counted all my bruises and says he's going to keep a chart on them from week to week. What a kid!

I just got hit in the back of the head by a flying pencil. Davy says I have to put in here that I ran for 140 yards and two touchdowns. I've never been one to brag on myself. Davy says this journal is an historical document that will be read by school children all over the country when I become

president so it has to be complete. I told him he should begin keeping one about his experiences and he could add the things in it that he's afraid I'm leaving out. He really should keep one. I'm sure it would inspire other kids going through similar problems.

Next week we play Fairview. I think we can beat them. We'll be up for it. We have to win against all the other smaller teams if we have a chance to make the playoffs. I just got hit by another pencil.

"I'm bored, Adam. Weed to me, pwease."

It was what he used to say to me when we were little kids.

"Give me just ten more minutes of peace so I can get this done, okay?"

Another pencil - that one point first into the back of my neck. The lad needs to be shown who is still boss in this room. I'll be right back.

...

An hour later: The most wonderful thing just happened. I was suffocating Davy by forcing my pillow over his face with one hand and tickling his ribs with the other when he moved his right leg. He raised his knee at least three inches off the bed like you do when you're on your back getting the stuffing tickled out of you. I stopped.

"Do that again," I said.

"Do what. Gasp for my last breath of life?"

"No. Move your leg."

"What?"

"Didn't you feel that?"

"That what?"

I went on to tell him what I'd seen. He tried to move it several times but he couldn't make anything happen. Mom and Dad were long asleep so I didn't wake them. I was sure it was the best possible kind of news. We'd call the physical therapist first thing in the morning – Sunday or not. I just went ahead and did his therapy for the night. We are both really excited about what happened.

"Show me how it was." he asked when I finished, so I put my hand under his knee and raised it up the three inches.

"Can you feel that?" I asked.

He shook his head and asked me to do it over and over again. I'm not sure what he thought that would accomplish, but I did it. Tears began running down his cheeks. I lay down beside him on his bed and he leaned his head into my shoulder.

"It's just so hard, you know," he said.

It was the first time he had admitted that – out loud at least.

"I know and yet I understand that I can't really know."

I suppose that didn't provide much comfort, but what else could I honestly say? I tried once more.

"We are going to get through this, Davy. We are! You and I have always reached every goal we've ever worked toward together."

I just talked to him for a long time remembering all the stuff we had accomplished – the tree house, the shack down by the creek, the no-girls-allowed-club when we were six and eight. We chuckled about how that perspective had certainly changed. I rambled on for a while longer about how we had both made first string this year and then noticed that he had fallen asleep. So much for my stimulating conversation, I guess. I pulled the sheet up around his shoulders and turned out the ceiling light, then came back here to my desk. I need to sleep, also.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10th

I mean everything worked right last night. We trounced the Coyote's 44 to 9. Since Davy couldn't be there Dad kept him informed using the walkie-talkie feature of our cell phones – free minutes. Kyle, the littlest kid on the team, ran the opening kickoff back for a touchdown. Then their kicker slipped on their next kickoff and managed a whopping three-yarder which we recovered on their forty-three-yard line. Next play I faked a run right and then took off for the end zone. The pass was perfect. Twenty-one seconds into the game and we were up by fourteen – that was one point every one and half seconds – not too shabby. Things just kept going our way. Coach played our bench the entire fourth quarter – we went into it 44 – zip.

It was so exciting I even forgot about Davy and his problems for a little while. It was the first time he hadn't been right here in the front of my mind since the accident or whatever it should be called.

When I got home that night Davy had written, "Yeah Cougars!!" across his chest in magic marker. Some of the letters were backwards since he'd used a hand mirror in the process, but nobody cared.

"That's permanent marker," I reminded him later on. "It'll probably still be there on your wedding night. How romantic."

He threw his pillow at me.

"I got a surprise for you," he said. "Take my legs out from under the sheet."

I stuffed the pillow back under his head and rolled down the sheet.

"So. Still two hairy legs and two ugly size eleven feet the way I see it. What's the surprise?"

He tossed me a pencil – gently, that time.

"You want me to autograph your foot?"

He smiled, but clearly had more serious things on his mind.

"Run the point of the pencil hard against the sole of my right foot – heal to toes."

About half way up his foot, it happened. His toes bent toward me and his knee raised up a few inches off the bed. I burst into tears.

"Ya! I know," he said, wiping back a few of his own. "Do it again!"

I did and got the same reaction. I tried the other foot. Nothing happened.

"Well, one's a whole lot better than neither, Bro. That's great! Do Mom and Dad know?"

"Mom discovered it. I got hot during the game and I asked her to take my socks off. In the process, she ran her thumb nail up my sole and it all happened just like now."

"Dad has to see this, Okay?" I said not really asking or waiting for his permission.

I went in search of him. He and Mom were standing in the living room, holding each other close. I hesitated, thinking

how nice that was and suddenly realizing how hard the past weeks had to have been on them. Then I spoke.

"If you two love birds can pull yourselves apart for a little while I'd like to direct your attention to the center ring – Davy's bed – for an act so spectacular you may not believe your eyes."

I figured Mom had already shared the good news with Dad, but blustered on as if he didn't know.

"Drum roll please," I said as we entered the bedroom.

Davy thumped his chest with his fists.

Like a dancing magician I picked up the pencil and with great flair approached the end of the bed. After zeroing in on his foot like a mother with a spoon full of apricots for a reluctant kid in a highchair, I stuck the point into the exact spot that triggered the reaction before. Right on cue his toes curled and his knee jumped.

It was one of the few times I'd ever seen tears on my father's face. It somehow made him seem more human. Surprisingly, I wasn't sure if I liked that or not. I'll have to think it through another time, I guess.

We celebrated with ice cream and saltine crackers – a family tradition I've never seen anywhere else. After the folks left, Davy and I talked into the wee hours of the morning. We remembered good times and talked seriously about the various possibilities in his future. He had clearly been doing lots of thinking about it. He had always pinned his going to college hopes on getting a baseball scholarship. This side of a miracle, that was not now going to be how his life would play out. Davy was smart, but never tried to be a good student. He figured now that had to become his focus. He had three years to prove his smarts to himself and possible colleges. I was sure he could do it if he set his mind to it. For my part, I'd refrain from beating on his head any more.

We talked about girls – of course – and tried to remember at what point in our lives we stopped disliking them and started thinking about them and all their wonderful 'features' during most all of our waking hours. There was about a year in there when I was thirteen and he was eleven that I had to play act a little with him – not daring to admit there were things about girls that really did interest me. Davy

developed a bit sooner than I had in that way, which worked out pretty well for us.

He asked about Amber and if she had been asking about him. I came right out and asked him if he was interested in her. He admitted that he was. It was okay with me.

"Who wants to be stuck with a girl that kisses that bad, anyway?" I said trying to make light of it.

"About that," Davy said, and I suddenly thought I knew what was coming.

"She's really not such a bad kisser, is that what you mean?"

"I sort of made that up to ease my big brother's pain, you see."

"I see. Okay. That was actually a nice thing to have done. It doesn't change the fact that I will get you for it. You won't know when. You won't know where, but I WILL get you!"

We exchanged broad smiles.

I don't want to think this of myself, but I believe I've grown to love him more since the accident – maybe more than I ever would have if it hadn't happened. That doesn't say much for me, does it? That it took something so terrible to make me realize what a precious brother I had and what a wonderful relationship we shared. It might have happened anyway, of course, and I want to believe it would have. Maybe this just nudged it into place a bit ahead of schedule.

When we were little, Mom would have us listen to each other's bedtime prayers. I'd always end mine with, "and God bless Davy," He'd end his with, "and God bless Adam." We stopped sharing our prayers years ago. Since he's come home from the hospital I've started saying, "I love you, Davy," last thing before I go to sleep. He always says it back. I think sometimes he stays awake just waiting for that. It's sort of like sharing a prayer, I suppose. We've never talked much about love. We probably should.

A friend took a picture of Grace and me the other morning. I just got a print yesterday. I have it propped up here on my desk. Looking at her beautiful face and kind eyes makes me know that I really want to become more than just friends. Not sure how I'll go about that.

It's almost midnight. I guess I'm finished writing in here for this week. . . .

"Love you, Davy."

"Love you, Adam."

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24TH

Two in a row. We're on a roll even if we just squeaked by last night – 7 to 6. I suppose it wasn't an exciting game for the spectators, but I thought it was great. Both defenses were fantastic. We held them to ninety-one yards. Our team ended up with nearly twice that. We just couldn't punch it into the end zone. I missed a couple of passes I should have had, but then I caught one on the three that nobody thought would be possible so I guess those sorts of evened out. Since I'd caught that one coach let me run it in for the TD on the next play. That's always a thrill. I really can't figure out how carrying a little ball across a white line can be so important, but believe me, it is!

There's bad news and good news on the Grace front – well, actually, her front is strictly good news and her back isn't all that shabby either, but I'm wandering off the subject. I took her to lunch on Wednesday and asked her if she'd go out with me – be my girlfriend. She said she really liked me but not as a boyfriend. The not as a boyfriend part was the bad news, but the fact she really likes me still gives me hope. I'm not giving up. I figure really liking me is a whole lot closer to boyfriend liking me than just plain liking me would be. Sounds confusing when I write it down, but it all seems pretty clear inside my head.

I blew an Algebra quiz on Wednesday, but when I do well on the test next week I can bring my grade back up. I really like that teacher. He took time to show me what I'd done wrong and how to fix it. That's how teachers should be, I think – teachers, not class holders like some I've had.

The physical therapist is really pleased with Davy's progress. She won't make any long-term predictions yet, but I can tell she's pretty optimistic. She says Davy can sit up in his wheelchair for an hour and a half two times a day now and that he can sit up in bed anytime he wants to. We've started

shooting hoops when I get home in the afternoon. He makes me sit in a chair, too. It's amazing how hard it is to shoot sitting down. We're both getting better at it. He still works out with his weights every day. He's worried that his abs are getting flabby. I tell him that sitting up for longer periods will help that some and that we'll work on them after his legs start working. He smiles and agrees, but I can tell he's not convinced they are ever going to work again. They just have to, you know.

Davy is doing well in his school work. His tutor gets the assignments from the regular teachers at school and then gets Davy going on them. I'm hoping that by second semester he can be back in school in his 'hot rod' – that's what he calls his wheelchair. I expect to come home some afternoon and find racing stripes on it. That brought up another problem.

He asked me how my car fund was coming. I've been saving since ninth grade. My plan was to get a car this year, but when Davy needed the chair, I insisted that my parents take my car money to help pay for it – motorized chairs are killer expensive. I know he'll feel bad if he finds out what I did, but I don't want to lie to him about it. It's my problem. I thought about asking Dad what he thought, but he's got enough to worry about without that. I've been stalling Davy about it, but he'll soon catch on that something's fishy.

Amber and two of her friends came by to see him after school on Tuesday. I left the room so she wouldn't feel uncomfortable. The four of them laughed a lot. That was good to hear. The other two left the room first and came out into the living room and we talked a while. I assume that was so Davy and Amber could share a kiss if they wanted to. I didn't ask and he didn't offer. It's driving me crazy not knowing and he knows it – the little imp!

He's kissed a lot more girls than I have. For him, kissing is more like a sport. For me it is a more serious expression of affection between two people that really care about each other. I sure would like to get down to doing some serious expressing of affection with Grace. I've decided that next week I'm going to ask her to be my girlfriend again. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. I've never been shy about asking for what I want. If she says no I'll just keep trying.

I hope that next Saturday I can write that we're three and one. We play Lawrenceville. I haven't seen film or heard the scouting reports yet. They beat us 10 to 7 last year with a last-minute field goal. That really didn't mean they were better – just that they won. They've always been a passing team so I should get a good workout. I'm looking forward to that.

Homecoming will be here in a few weeks. It's hard to think that Davy isn't going to be there playing. I hate dances, but if I'm going out with Grace by then (and I do intend to be) and if she wants to go I'm sure I'll go. I'll have to find a way to make some money.

My younger sibling is calling.

"Itch my foot, will you?"

"You mean scratch your foot. Your foot itches and you need the itch scratched."

"Whatever. Just do it!"

"Please?"

"Please!"

"Pretty please?" I teased some more.

"Pretty please with *Tenactin* on it. Go! Scratch!"

I went over and prepared to do the scratching thing at some yet to be designated spot on his right foot – the one that was responding to stimulation on the sole.

"Not that one. The other one. In the valley behind my toes."

"Your left foot? You have feeling in your LEFT foot?"

"Either that or I have a wild imagination," he said, grinning.

I began rubbing his foot.

"Ahhhhhhh!" he said putting his head back as if suddenly in ecstasy.

"Davy! How long have you had feeling in this foot?"

"About the length of a thirty second itch, I guess."

I moved my hands up his leg.

"Anything?" I asked.

He pulled himself back into a sitting position.

"Yes. I really believe I can feel it."

"Close your eyes and tell me where I'm touching you."

"Ankle. Calf. Knee. Hey, do the other leg."

I repeated it and again he was feeling all over his lower

leg. Still nothing on the upper part but WOW! It was great!

"Do it some more," he said clearly eager to just experience feeling again.

"I can see the headlines now," I said.

"What?"

"Older brother spends night feeling the legs of his younger brother."

His pillow hit me square in the center of my chest. It was wonderful. I went to the kitchen and got the yard stick so he could touch his legs all by himself. He is still over there scratching away and grinning from ear-to-ear. He'll tell our folks in the morning. I'm going to sleep, now. Doubt if he'll get much tonight. I hope he doesn't get splinters!

"Love you, Davy."

"Love you, Adam."

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OCTOBER

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1

Two and two. We lost to Lawrenceville last night. I'm finally feeling comfortable playing both sides of the line. I guess it took me this long to find my stride. It wasn't that we played bad – they were just better. Their D-back also went in as running back sometimes so we got to know each other really well. I think he'd make a pretty good friend. Maybe this summer we can get together.

Speaking of friends (which I haven't been doing much in here since school started), Daunte and I plan to hang out together next Friday – it's a teacher's restructuring day or some such thing. Bottom line is we don't have school. Dad says I can use his truck in the afternoon. He and Mom both seem happy I'm going to be getting back with him – back to having a social life of my own is what they're really saying I think. Other than at school I guess I have been staying pretty close to home.

The physical therapist added a new exercise that takes both Dad and me to administer. Davy is supposed to stand for one or two minutes every day. Really it means that Dad and I support him – his arms around our shoulders and ours around his waist. He's not really standing yet, but he is beginning to take some weight on his legs without them collapsing. I guess that's the first step – so to speak. It tires him out, but I think that's good. Muscles need to get tired to grow, right? I think he's finally putting on some weight.

Sometimes at night I hear him crying – sobbing I guess

is a better word. I get out of bed and go over and lay with him – put my arm under his neck and pull him close like I'd do back when we were little and he'd wake up from a bad dream. We never say anything. Sometimes I stay with him the rest of the night. Other times, after he goes back to sleep, I leave him. We never talk about it. It's just a big brother thing and I'm glad I can be there for him.

We play Marc Conner Academy this week – named after one of their students who died as the result of a football injury. That's what I really need in my life right now!! The game's a tossup. We've played them even over the past six years. Coach has been having me work on our option pass play. He must think that's going to be useful again. I'm not the Worlds' best passer, but if it's not too far a toss I can usually wobble it there. I really am enjoying football this year. It's lots of hard work. Maybe I need that to keep my mind off the other stuff. If I let myself think about it I can get really sad for Davy. That won't help anybody so I try to keep my mind elsewhere – like on Grace.

She still hasn't said yes, but she hasn't said no and she hasn't told me to stop asking. She gets a certain look on her face every time I ask. It's like she's really pleased I want her to be my girlfriend and maybe also pleased that I'm being so persistent. I may be reading things into it, but that's how it seems to me and that gives me hope.

Amber drops by a couple times a week to see Davy. I asked him what was up with them. He said he liked her, but he didn't know if she really liked him or just felt sorry for him. In the meantime, until he figured all that out, he'd just enjoy kissing her and think about asking her to be his girlfriend later – after he got back to 'normal'.

It was the first time in a long time I've heard him talk like he had any real hope that he was going to recover. It made me happy to hear that. Maybe having a girl that he isn't sure of, is giving him some motivation to get better, so he can find out for sure just how she feels. That sounds dumb, I guess, but I'll take any kind of incentives for him I can find right now.

I spent three hours raking leaves for the city down at the park. That put about fifteen bucks into my wallet. I will probably take all that for gas and food Friday when I'm with

Daunte. I asked the therapist if Davy could go for rides in the car yet. He didn't say no to short runs, but Friday will be too long. Daunte's really my friend anyway and Davy wouldn't want to intrude. He's always after me to go out with the guys. I'm not sure when he thinks I have time for that?

My grades are looking good and I'm really pleased. Keeping that 3.0 plus helps a lot on the car insurance. Davy will turn sixteen in November. If he's able to drive by then I'm sure the insurance will go up another hundred bucks or so even though his grades are looking great. I've never seen him really excited about school work before. He has a great teacher and that really makes a difference. He has lots of time on his hands so that may be part of it, too. Nobody has mentioned when he'll be able to go back to school. I imagine it will depend on when he's able to sit up in his wheel chair for that long.

I have a BIG Government test next week. About a billion definitions and lots of who did what, when, stuff. I hate that kind of a test. Davy's been quizzing me. He's pretty good at it. Says he does it like his tutor. I guess we'll see how well it works on Wednesday.

I'm going to cut it short tonight. I'm helping with the lesson in Sunday School tomorrow and I haven't started yet.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8

It's been a great week, and a so-so week, and a terrible week. We beat the Cottonmouths – barely. With ten seconds to go in the game they were up on us 7 to 6. It seemed like I couldn't have caught a ball coated with glue that night and their line was always right where I wanted to go when I was carrying. It had been a real frustrating game. I did make some pretty good defensive plays but we needed points and I hadn't come through. We really needed Davy out there.

With 28 seconds to go in the game, they were on their own three after fumbling in their backfield on first down. They had to get to the twenty for a first. Our line had finally caught fire and they hadn't been able to move the ball on us all that quarter; in fact, they were a negative 22 yards in the fourth. The coach sent in a defense against the run thinking they

would just try and run out the clock. I didn't see it that way. I figured a pass play right at the twenty because the way our line was manhandling them they risked a safety and that would have cinched it for us.

Their formation was heavy to their right. It certainly had the look of a run between guard and tackle. I lined up with the others so it would appear to be an obvious run defense. As the ball was snapped I back peddled to the 18. There it came just five yards to my right. I let their receiver get past and slipped in between him and the ball. I've never leaped so high in all my life but I made a fingertip interception and had a free, undefended, run straight into the end zone. It wasn't my best game ever by a long shot but I think that play was the highlight of my career so far. I wished Davy had been there. The coach said I could bring the game tape home and show Davy. I'll get it Monday.

Next week is homecoming and we have something special planned for Davy. He's never been taken off the roster so officially he's still on the team. Just before game time Dad will take him to the field – we're going to tell him his therapist says he can go and watch the first half – and that much is the truth. Dad will take him to the bench so he can watch from the sideline. But here's the surprise. When the announcer calls the names of the two team's captains for the game, Davy's name will be called and he'll get to go out to the center of the field for the coin toss. It was coach's idea. Pretty nice, I think. I really hope we can win it, not just because it's homecoming but for Davy's sake.

I asked Grace to be my girlfriend again, and again she politely said no. Davy says I'm being too gentle about it. He says if you want something you have to go get it – use whatever force it takes. Drag her into the cave by her hair! Next week I'm going to ask her every day until she makes a firm decision one way or the other – no, make that until she says yes!

Friday after the game I walked home through the park. Jerry, the other D-back, was there with two of his friends. They were some hundred feet ahead of me on the path that curves in and out around all the big old trees so they didn't see me behind them. I saw them stop and light up –

cigarettes I figured. That's not allowed if you're on the team, of course, but I know some of the guys do it anyway. Then they walked on and so did I. When I got to where I could smell their smoke I knew it wasn't any regular cigarettes they were smoking – it was pot. Cigarettes I probably would have overlooked but marijuana? I'm not sure I can just look the other way. He and I got the random drug test last week so chances are he won't have another one. I don't know what to do. If I ask Dad, he'll say turn him in. Dad's a pretty much right or wrong sort of guy. I think I'll talk it over with Davy first. He's able to see things Dad doesn't.

Davy's sort of at a standstill this week. I guess I'm hoping for too much too soon. He's keeping a good outlook at least on the outside. His leg muscles are gradually getting smaller. I'm not sure he can see that yet. He will eventually. Dad and I still do the exercises with him of course. His therapist told Dad the loss of muscle mass was normal in cases like this and that once he got enough control to begin moving his legs on his own it would begin to rebuild. She had no idea how long that might take – if it ever happens. He has feeling back in both legs up to the bottom of his hips. There's still that area between his navel and his crotch that's without any sensation. He pinches his rear end from time to time but still can't feel anything. He refers to himself as the "buttless wonder". Like I said, he keeps his spirits up, somehow, and that keeps ours up as well.

He and Amber seem to have grown pretty close in a good, relaxed, sort of way. I'm quite sure she likes him for who he is and not just because of his problem. I get the idea Davy is coming to see that, too. At any rate, after they've had their private kissing time he wears a smile for the next hour and a half. (I sure would like to kiss her just once!)

I aced that Government test that Davy helped me study for. I think his tutor is onto something pretty good when it comes to that study method. You just turn every fact you read in the text book or have in your class notes into a question and then review those questions. It works like a charm.

I just talked with Davy about the drug thing while I was helping him with his exercises. Davy says first of all I need to talk with Jerry and tell him what I saw and what I suspect.

Maybe it was the others who were doing pot and he really did just have a regular cigarette. I know Jerry well enough to know he won't admit it to me if he was doing dope so I'm not sure what I'll learn. Davy says that doesn't matter. That I owe it to him to go to him first. Once I've done that, of course, I can't just turn him in anonymously to coach – that's the system he has set up. Jerry will be mad at me and if coach suspends him or kicks him off the team the rest of the guys will be mad at me, too. We can't afford to lose him. Sometimes there's just no way to win. Davy says it isn't a matter of ME winning. It's all about what's best for Jerry. How am I supposed to know that? How can it help if I don't tell? How can it help if I do tell? How can it hurt if I don't tell? How can it hurt if I do tell? What could happen to me if coach found out I knew and didn't say anything? I suppose the bottom line will have to be some solution I can live with deep inside of myself. That little chat with myself sure didn't help! Sometimes things are so hard. One thing's for sure, if I don't quit bombarding myself with these questions I'll never get to sleep.

“Love you, Davy.”

“Love you, Adam.”

SATURDAY OCTOBER 15TH

HEADLINE: GRACE SAYS YES. It took five tries all within two minutes but SHE SAID YES. The time was 9:52. My pulse rate was 110. The day was . . . Oh, who cares: SHE SAID YES!!! We agreed to try it for a while and if either of us found we didn't like it, we would go back to being friends. But, SHE SAID YES!!! I asked her to the homecoming dance but she said no because she had a church activity that night. I respected her for that but still, SHE SAID YES!!! I'm not sure what will happen next but we can talk about that when we have lunch together on Tuesday.

It was the greatest homecoming ever! Davy was completely surprised. When the crowd saw Dad bringing him down the track toward the bench, they stood and cheered. At first, Davy didn't understand what it was all about and he looked around and then up at Dad. “I just imagine it's for you,

Son,” he said. Then Davy looked up over the bleachers and raised his hand, waving through his confusion. I saw the smile break across his face and felt a single tear run down my own. When he reached the bench, the guys greeted him with high fives and all the dumb stuff guys say at times like that.

He pulled in and parked at the end of the bench just as the announcer began to speak. “I direct your attention to the center of the field where the co-captains will meet for the coin toss. Representing the Falcons will be Doug Daniels and Cory Jackson, and for your hometown Cougars, Adam and Davy Carter.” I have to admit I didn’t even hear my name at first – I was so excited about Davy. I tossed his jersey to him. By the time he managed to get into it, I realized my name had been called as well. It was a total surprise to me – something the team had worked out. The coach had to give me a shove to get me started. I was never so proud as while we made our way, side by side, out to middle of the field. I don’t really remember much of what happened out there but we won the toss and deferred. Davy remained through the first half and then had to get home and into bed. It seemed like he brought us good luck. It was 35 to 10 at half. The second half was pretty dull offensively and in the end, we won 42 to 10.

So, that brings our record to three and two. The rest are all must win games and they’ll be really tough. Next week it’s the Cheetahs. They’ve had lots of key injuries and most of the starters are sophomores. Maybe we’ll catch a break.

On Monday after practice I had THE talk with Jerry. I told him what I thought I’d seen and he denied it – no different than what I thought it would be. I left it at that. Then on Thursday evening, when I was coming home from the library about eight, I took the short cut through the park again. Who should I run into but Jerry and his buddies. This time I figured I should confront him so there would be no doubt about what I knew. I walked up to them. They were sitting on the swings all lit up. The area was heavy with thick smoke.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“Just relaxing a little. Want to join us?”

“No thanks. I have other ways of relaxing.”

“Chicken?”

“No, just smart!”

“Whatever.”

I reminded him that on Monday he'd denied to me that he smoked. He said if I believed that I was stupider than I looked. I said, “What about coach's speech this afternoon – that anybody suspected of doing drugs will be tested and if he shows positive they'll be kicked off the team?”

“How's he going to find out? It wouldn't be real healthy for the guy who opened his mouth, you know what I mean?”

“At this point I might as well tell. You'll think it's me regardless, right?”

“You got that right. Maybe we should take care of it right now before anybody has a chance to say anything.”

The three of them jumped off the swings and closed in around me. I didn't know the others well but had no doubt they could flatten me like a pancake. I had two options. Stay and get pulverized or use my 4.4 speed and get out of there. I opted for the second and soon found myself clear and free a block from home. I knew it wasn't over. I'd have to deal with them later. For the time being, at least, I was still in one piece.

I must have acted shook up when I got to our room because Davy asked right out what was wrong. Again, I seemed to have two options: Lie and try to avoid the whole thing or tell the truth and cause more worry for Davy. This was Davy. The first option wasn't really an option. I put my books down on my desk and laid back on my bed. I explained to Davy what had happened.

“What you going to do?”

“Wish I knew. Any suggestions? No, that's not a fair question. This is my doing, I'll deal with it.”

“This is my brother. I'll help – if I can. You are going to tell coach, of course. Actually, no, you're not. Go to sleep. I got it covered.”

Ever since we've been little kids I get uneasy when Davy comes up with some secret plan to fix things. Like when Butchy challenged me to a bike race – the loser would have to eat a worm – and Davy loosened his front wheel so his bike fell apart at the first turn.

“I don't think so,” I said. “Not until you spill the whole plan to me.”

“You really don't want to know.”

“I KNOW that, but you tell me anyway!”

“Okay, but you’ll wish you hadn’t asked.”

“That’s exactly why I’m asking.”

“Here’s the deal. I’ll call coach and tell him I’ve heard some pretty reliable gossip about Jerry and some kind of drug use – I won’t specify pot.”

“But Jerry will think it was me anyway.”

“No, he won’t. I’ll have Amber tell her friends that I was the one who made the call. Her friends can’t keep a secret, you know that.”

“Jerry will still know I was the one who told you.”

“Won’t matter.”

“Says who?”

“Says Rachel, Jerry’s girlfriend. Amber says that Suzzie told her that Kathy said that Rachel told Jerry that if he got in one more fight she’d break up with him for good. Now what do you think Jerry will choose, being around a bunch of smelly football players or spending time with a beautiful, soft, sweet smelling girl.”

“It just might work,” I said giving it a quick think through. His logic wasn’t really tight – Jerry’d be off the team for either fighting or drugs but then it was Jerry the pot head we were dealing with. I’d bet on Davy’s plan.

I felt better. I got up and began helping him with his exercises. Davy chattered on about this and that. I sort of listened and I sort of thought about Grace. Now that we were going out, I wondered what that would really mean – holding hands, kissing, things like that. The next thing I remember hearing was Davy saying: “Do you suppose that’s a record?”

I had no idea what he was referring to. He sensed it and repeated himself. Amber and me. Holding a kiss for eighteen point six minutes. Is that a record?”

I told him I wasn’t sure about that, but I WAS sure the eighteen point six minute rib-tickling he was about to receive would be a record.

He giggled like a five-year-old. I supposed I was taking undue advantage of him but it was always worth it when we’d see his knee raise just that three inches off the bed. It happened repeatedly that night. The therapist said it was good that it was happening but that it was an entirely different

section of the nervous system from the one Davy could consciously control and THAT was the one we were waiting on. And it seemed like that was exactly what we were doing – w a i t i n g. I wondered if Davy realized how little progress he had made the past few weeks. I hoped he hadn't. But it was Davy so of course he had.

Every night, now, Dad and Mom come in to say goodnight to us. They always give Davy a kiss – Mom to his cheek and Dad to his forehead. I could feel jealous – left out – if I'd let myself, I suppose. Oh, I know they love me every bit as much as they do him. They'd stopped that nightly ritual years ago – until the accident. If I'd ask for the same treatment, I'd get it of course. Guys my age don't ask their parents for a goodnight kiss. I'd take it. I'd treasure it. But, I'd never ask for it. I had an idea.

After they had left – about ten minutes later – I went out to the living room where they always read a while before turning in. I said goodnight and then leaned down and gave mom a kiss on her cheek. I went over and did the same to dad, on his forehead, then just came back into our room. I felt great. It was even better giving that kind of a kiss than getting one. What a nice feeling to drift off to sleep with.

“Love you, Davy.”

“Love you, Adam.”

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22

Well, that 'awful' team – the Cheetahs – with all the injuries and a pack of starting sophomores – whipped our butts good last night. That isn't exactly true. All their injured starters were back – unknown to us – and they were ready to land some big time hurt on somebody. It just happened we were the team that was most handy. 42 – 2. I suppose I don't need to say more. Journals are to preserve memories and I'm not at all sure I want to preserve that one. The only real highlight happened on the first kickoff when we got a safety. From ten seconds into the game, however, it was all downhill. I caught twelve passes but never when or where it really did any good. I ran for sixty-three yards but the same

story – never when or where it counted. We punted 19 times – a school record. They had an even dozen sacks against us – another school record. Our total ground game earned a negative nineteen yards, yet another record. At least there were no individual's names attached to any of them. We have to win all three of the remaining games to make the playoffs. Everybody was feeling down in the locker room after the game. I told them it was clear to me that in that one game we had made all the bad plays we were allotted for the season, so our future looked pretty bright. It garnered a few smiles and seemed to break the string of 'kick ourselves' comments. We're a good team. We just have to keep it all together on every play. We have a chance at the playoffs, yet.

Lunch with Grace was great. We changed it from Tuesday to Wednesday because on Wednesday we get an extra half hour. It was like every time I took a bite I had to stop and think if I really wanted to take my eyes off of her long enough to eat. She's beautiful from every angle. She didn't bring up the going back to being friends, thing, and, of course, neither did I. It felt really comfortable for me and I got the idea it was for her, too. We never seem to have a problem finding things to talk about. She has a choir competition of some kind coming up and she'll be gone all day Friday. It won't seem right not getting to see her. I'll REALLY miss her.

This is the 22nd. Davy's birthday is on November 4th. That's about a dozen days away. I'm baffled about what to do for him. I don't know whether to go for something that will show him how certain I am of his eventual recovery – like a new ball glove or pair of cleats – or just ignore the whole injury thing and go for something else like a shirt or . . . Perhaps some kind of ointment to protect his lips from the rigors of marathon kissing! THAT he'd think was hilarious. I'll do it at least as part of his present.

Jerry quit the team after the game tonight. I think it was a deal Jerry's father made with coach. Not knowing the details, I can't say if I agree or disagree with how it was handled. The upside for me is that I still have two arms and legs and my other vital, boy-type, organs are all in their proper places. I'm not sure I like how I handled the whole thing, though. Part of me says I should have acted like a man and

turned him in, facing whatever followed like a man. Another part of me is very pleased that I will be able to father a future generation of Carters. The older I get the more I realize that few big problems seems to have simple answers. Ah! The joys of growing up!

Back to Grace. She is wonderful! She lets me hold her hand when we're alone. I haven't had the nerve to talk about kissing yet. She's had some boyfriends. I haven't (I suppose my father is very happy about that!). What I meant was, I've not had a long-term kissing relationship with a girl before and I'm not sure about her. We seem to be able to talk about most everything so I'm sure kissing will come up soon. She is soooooo beautiful. I think about kissing her a lot – I mean a LOT. She's soft and her hair smells wonderful and I like the way she tosses it sometimes. I think it's prettiest when she wears it pulled back but I think she prefers it draped around her face and dangling down on her shoulders. That's fine, too. Just so long as I can be within easy reach of it. I like the way she always looks right into my eyes when we talk – even when we don't talk. She has gorgeous eyes. I'd really never paid much attention to a girl's eyelashes before but hers are long, and dark, and perfect. It's certainly amazing to me how I used to feel like tossing my cookies at the mere thought of boy-girl romantic stuff. Ah! The joys of growing up!!

My grades are holding. I'm going to ask mom and dad if I can take on a job at the Vets office on South School. They need a relief care person on Saturday mornings. I'd get to feed and water and comb the dogs and cats and take the dogs outside for exercise and other essential functions. I think I'd really like it. About three hours a week. I'll be needing money for dates and things now that Grace is a part of my life. I know twenty-five bucks a week won't go far but Grace doesn't need a lot. She told me that. She just needed me. Pretty nice, I thought, but still, I really do want to get her things.

I hadn't thought about it before but Davy doesn't have a red cent to his name. He can't get Amber anything. She doesn't seem to mind. I guess she can't really expect much considering his condition. I wonder if Davy misses money. I'll ask.

Davy and I had a really good talk. He does miss having

money – where Amber is concerned, at least. I have an idea about getting him some kind of work he can do here at home. I'm not sure what, but you're always hearing about 'work at home opportunities'. He got excited about it and is going to talk with Mom. She may have some connections through her job. He also knows that his progress has come to a screeching halt. He's down about it but made we swear I wouldn't let on to Mom and Dad. He says he spends a lot of time thinking about what kind of a life he can build for himself if he never gets any better than he is right now. He's decided he can go to college though he doesn't have any idea what he'd study – accounting maybe, or computer something or other. He's wondering about marriage and if that would be fair for his partner. We didn't go into that but I think he meant the physical stuff. He also wonders if he could be a coach – he has the knowledge about baseball for sure but couldn't really show the kids how to do things. Maybe a sports announcer. I'll have to remember to mention that. There's nothing wrong with his vocal chords and he's always had the gift of gab. In the end, he said he was really scared. I didn't know how to respond to that. I said something like, "It wouldn't be reasonable not to be scared in his situation." That couldn't have helped much but like I said, I didn't know what to say. He hates it that he has to depend on us for everything. I pointed out to him all the things he really is doing for himself, just like he always did. I'll admit the list wasn't very long but I think it helped.

We planned a special outing together. He's up to being in his chair for three hours at a time. We're going to do a double date thing, if the girls will agree to it, and I know they will. It won't be anything fancy but we'll go out to eat and then take in a movie. If we plan it out right, we can do that within the three-hour window. He really perked up at that idea. He and Amber will choose the restaurant and Grace and I (well, probably Grace) will choose the movie. I'll drive the car with Davy and Amber in the back and Grace with me up front. Dad will follow with the chair in the pickup. It will work out great. I know it will. Good old Dad.

Davy said he was hesitant to be out in public in his chair. I reminded him how well he'd done at the football game

and the few times he'd gone to church. He felt better about it then. He said he wanted to make a sign to put on the back of his chair that would read, "Don't honk! Just pass with care. I'm new at driving this thing."

It cracked me up and soon we were both laughing 'til we cried. That was really good. We hadn't done that very often since the accident. "Accident." I hate that word. It wasn't just an accident. It was a jealousy driven, revenge seeking, hurt intended, wallop that probably ruined my brother's life forever. Yeah! Right! It was the fall not the blow. Sure. The fall that never would have happened if I'd kept myself under control. I'm so ashamed of what I did. I cry about it almost every night. It's so sad at night to hear Davy's sobs as I lay in my bunk trying to keep my own quiet so he won't hear. Guess it's time to stop this writing and dampen another pillowcase.

"Love you, Davy."

"Love you, Adam."

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 29

Lots of good news this week. Davy gets to sit up in his chair for as long as he feels comfortable. I told him to try and just work up gradually so when second semester begins maybe he'll be able to handle all or at least half a day at school. That would be great and I'll bet he'll do it!

Mom got him some 'at home' work from a local candle factory. They bring him flat boxes and he folds them into boxes. They're just small to fit a single candle. It doesn't take long for him to fill up our room with boxes once they're made up. On Thursday, his tutor got caught under an avalanche of them. I guess it was pretty humorous to hear Davy tell about it.

"How you doing, Davy?"

"Oh, pretty good, I guess, I 'boxed' with my tutor on Thursday."

He goes on and on and on about it. He cracks us all up. He's got a good system now. I pile the flat boxes up on the right side of his bed against the wall. When he finishes one he it puts it into a big trash bag attached open on the back

of a kitchen chair. When the bag's full, he ties it closed and throws it out into the living room. He can fold three of them a minute and they pay him five cents a box – that's nine bucks an hour. I could sure use an hour of that action every day! I'll have to have a talk with the little squirt. Every evening they send a van to pick up what he has finished so by the time mom gets home the living room's back to normal.

We got a double date set up for tonight – it's why I'm writing all this at three instead of just before bed. I figure there will be lots of stuff to write later. I'm more nervous than he is. It will be the first-time Grace and I have really been on an official date. She's been great about it – having Davy tag along and all. She and Amber get along fine. I went down to the theater and arranged with the manager to reserve one of the wheelchair 'stalls' for us. Davy made reservations at the restaurant. Dad loaned us the money until we get paid. He offered. In all the excitement, Davy and I had both forgot about the money thing.

We held on to beat the Stallions last night – 22 to 15. Lots of strange scoring plays but I guess the score suggests that. Both defenses were pretty good – downright vicious in the red zone. We had two field goals, one safety, one touchdown with a missed PAT, and then on the last play of the game we went for the two-point conversion and got it. Didn't need it. Just felt like trying. The Stallions had two field goals, a touchdown and a safety of their own.

I was happy with the way I played. Davy got to go for the whole game. It tired him out, I could tell, but he wouldn't admit it. He kept notes for me on my performance – things to work on during the coming week. After I decided it wasn't really a put down but just a brother needing to feel like he was helping, I decided he had made some pretty good observations. Sure wish we could work out together.

This morning was my first time at the Vet's office. She, Dr. Baker, is super nice and I think I caught onto everything pretty fast. I like being with the animals even though Davy said I smelled like a farm when I got back. I took off my T-shirt, wadded it up, and held it over his face for a full minute – not sure why. Seemed to be the thing to do after his remark – which was in every way true. Good thing neither of us has

allergies to the little critters. Except for getting to see more dog poop than I had hoped to ever see in a lifetime, the job's really pretty good. I think the animals can sense I really like them. I'm sure being away from home is hard on them. I took a quick shower to freshen up even though I'll take another one before the big date tonight.

Davy's already worrying about getting cleaned up for it. He worries about the darndest things. This time he says his leg pits (meaning behind his knees) get all sweaty in bed and he's sure they must stink. He can't reach them because of the way we have to strap him in the tub so he doesn't fall over head first, so guess who gets to have 'leg pit' scouring duty in a few hours. Let's see: Dog poop or my brother's leg pits? That doggie do-do is looking better and better! (I'm kidding, of course. I'd do anything for Davy.)

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It was the greatest date ever! Davy and I kept everybody laughing all evening. Amber complained that her stomach hurt from laughing so much. Grace and I held hands through the whole movie. She laid her head on my shoulder sometimes. It was great. We had talked about kissing – at lunch on Tuesday – and decided we weren't ready for that yet (who's not ready????) I'll be patient. I know it will be worth it in the long run. She's really something!

Davy DID put a sign on the back of his chair but toned it down from his first idea. It just said: Caution. New Driver! Everybody who saw it giggled about it. I think it kept people from feeling quite so sorry for him. I'm sure that's what he was trying to accomplish. He's quite a character. The evening wore him out; he's already asleep.

Back to Grace and me. I can't find the right words to say how wonderful it was. It was like it was just her and me there all alone together in our own, darkened, World.

Davy said he needed to trade his chair in on a two-seater. Apparently, it was nearly impossible to get close enough to kiss – I said nearly impossible. Davy wouldn't pass up a beautiful girl in a dark room.

I still don't have a birthday present for him. Got some ideas. I think I'll go for the ridiculous rather than the practical this year. Davy's not the only imp in this family.

I'm thinking about a can of 3 & 1 Oil for his wheels, a set of bicycle turn signals to put on the back of his chair, and one of those flexible flag poles you see on some bikes. I saw a small flag for one that said, "Eat My Dust." Then, after he's asleep the night before, I'm going to fasten a card down by the spokes so when he moves it will make that flapping noise – we used to do it on our bikes all the time – called it our motor. Add some "Marathon Kissing Lip-Balm" and I think it will be perfect. I better get some sleep myself.

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NOVEMBER

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 5TH

It's hard to know where to begin. We beat the Rockwood Bucks – usually a really good team – 67 to 7. We didn't punt once! After we scored twice in the first 71 seconds of the game they became really disorganized – demoralized, too, I suppose. They hadn't been skunked in the past twenty-seven years. Coach Smith is not only a good coach, he's a good man. On the last play of the game, when the Bucks had the ball on their own fifteen he called the defense to the side and said to make it look good but he wanted them to score and keep their record alive. I'll tell you it wasn't easy to help them keep their record alive. I was defending the receiver we knew would be thrown to. I was playing in front and to his left. Their quarterback was really frazzled and the ball was way under thrown. I could see there was no way the receiver was going to catch it so, I moved up on it and caught it, myself. When he came up behind me to put a tackle on, I turned around and pushed the ball into his gut. Nobody could really see what happened. He looked really startled. I said, "You going to run with that thing or do I have to carry you?" He turned and I'll tell you, I've never seen a guy run that fast for that far in all my life. I couldn't have caught him if I'd been trying. It wasn't really fair I suppose but it had been a good thing to do I think. We won and kept our shot at the playoffs alive. They kept the no shut out record of a really good team

alive. Our team members all agreed to keep that final play to ourselves. I'm sure Davy will pry it out of me at some point but he can be trusted to keep his mouth shut - well, about that at least.

We had a little birthday party for Davy on the fourth (probably because that was his birthday! Ha! Ha!) It was just Mom and Dad and me, Amber and Grace, and Kurt - one of Davy's best friends. His guy friends haven't been coming around much. Probably because they don't know what to say. I figured getting Kurt here might get things started.

Kurt brought him a shirt from Branson - "World's greatest dip-stick". That certainly broke the ice. Amber and Grace went together and got him a great book - six hundred pages - about all the sports legends of the twentieth century. Lots of pictures. He really loves it. Mom and Dad did the clothes thing and a card with a twenty in it. Mom also arranged to have the staff at the hospital all sign a card for him. His eyes all teared up. On the envelope, it said, "To our most memorable patient EVER. We still miss your smile and jokes."

I hadn't been able to wait for the party, so that morning, as soon as he discovered the flapping card sound on his chair, I gave him my stuff. He REALLY liked it all. I got a hug. That was pretty nice. I added one thing to what I mentioned last week. I made up some IOU cards and put them in an envelope. They each said "IOU one POINT" with the instructions that he could redeem one for an extra point in any game of HORSE we played. He'll use them, too. I know he will.

I had another good day at the Vet clinic. She said if I wanted the Sunday shift I could have it as well. It would be early - before church - so I'm considering it. I really like it there. It's all the better because while I'm combing or petting the cats I pretend they're Grace, getting all my special attention. Not sure I should tell her that.

Davy's the rich one in the family. His first check was something over one hundred dollars for about two hours of work a day for a week. He said I could help and earn some money but I've decided that needs to be his thing. It helps him be independent and he really doesn't feel independent in

many ways these days.

He didn't make any big progress this week but he doesn't seem to get discouraged. He asks for his exercise time if Dad or I are running a little behind. Kurt said he'd be glad to come over and help with the after school "workout" as Davy calls it. I think that would be nice. I was kind of jealous about it at first – like it was my territory and Kurt was trying to butt in but I can see that it would be really good for the two of them to be together again. He'll come over on Monday and I'll show him how it's done.

Some of the stress and tension exercises are beginning to really hurt Davy as more and more feeling returns. That makes it extremely hard for me to do those things to him. Tears run down his face but he keeps smiling. Afterwards he always says thanks and something like, "Man, that was wonderful. It hurt like h-e-double hockey sticks, you know? It's hard to believe that pain like that can be so great – so welcome"

I just nod. I'm afraid if I tried to speak I'd get all choked up or something. It's really, really, hard, though. When it first started happening I talked to Dad and said I didn't know if I could continue doing it. He put it all in perspective. He asked me if I loved Davy. I said, yes, of course. He said, "Then you'll do whatever it takes to help him recover, right?" I've never wavered since.

I suppose there will be lots of things in life like that – things I have to do even though it produces hurt for me or somebody else in the short run. I hope I'm up to it. Maybe that's my upside in all of this – learning to do what I need to do even when I don't want to do it.

Grace came by and drove me to school last Wednesday. That was really nice. She still hasn't said anything about wanting to go back to just being friends. I'm glad about that. She asked me to go to church with her tomorrow at the little country church her family attends. I didn't know how Mom would react to that – we Carters always fill the same pew every Sunday morning. She said it would be fine, though. It will be kind of weird but it will be nice, too, sitting close beside Grace. It will be the first time I've met her parents. That's a little scary. Davy says to just be myself and

it will all be fine. I've been trying to convince myself of that all week. It makes a tight schedule. Get up and get Davy dressed. Go to work. Come home and shower off the animal smells. Drive out to Grace's place in the country. All that before nine thirty. Dad said I could take the car. They will need the truck to get the wheelchair to church. I know I'm complicating life around here but I also know my family is willing to help. I've had so few girlfriends I think my dad had started to think I was going to be an old maid (well, I know what I mean, at least!)

I have lots of homework that will have to wait until Sunday afternoon. I better get some sleep.

“Love you, Davy.”

“Love you, Adam.”

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12TH

I believe it was the most exciting game of the season – That's a good way to close it out. Well, there are the playoffs but I'm getting ahead of myself. It was 6-6 with nine seconds to go in the fourth quarter. I'd just snagged a forty-two-yard pass that put us on the Jackal's three. Leo, our biggest running back had gone out in the second with a badly sprained left ankle. I got the call to run it in. We had four downs but only nine seconds. Probably only one play – two at the most. I was to run right, between the guard and the tackle. The Jackals were waiting. I immediately saw I couldn't go over top so dove low, reaching the ball out at the last second. It was plainly over the goal line but my knees had hit the ground first. I knew they had touched. So did the ref. Time expired.

So, it was 6-6 at the end of regulation play and looked like it would be 6-6 at the end of the first over time. With something less than thirty seconds to go – I was too busy to take note of the clock – Jacksonville had to punt from their twenty-five. It was a super kick – a high hanger that gave their guys plenty of time to get to the ball. THAT, as it turned out, played right into coach's hand. He knew their punter always kicked high and to the sideline – usually our left. Coach bet it would be right this time – intentionally trying to fool us. He

had our line set heavy to the left. Blake, our scrawny little punt returner, and I lined up side by side in the middle of the field some forty yards behind the line. Then, he ran left to catch the ball. I hesitated and once the jackals had all committed themselves to go after Blake I took off for the right sideline. Blake caught the punt, threw it across the field to me and I ran sixty-five yards untouched. His pass was perfect – and Blake never throws perfect passes. In fact, I wouldn't have bet a dime he could even throw it clear across the field. But he really came through. Maybe it was the adrenaline rush he got seeing eleven of the biggest, loudest, high school, football players in the state rushing at him, clearly eager to inflict great pain and permanent damage to his 132-pound body.

As I headed for the goal line everybody in the stadium was yelling – the Jackal fans saying, "Get him! Get him!" Our side saying, "Go, Adam, Go!" Out of all of it I really only heard one voice – Davy's. "Afterburner, Slug. Kick in the afterburner!" There's nobody within twenty yards of me and he's screaming at me to run faster. He cracks me up. Just glad I didn't trip over my humongous smile.

It was a huge win so next Friday it's down to Jacksonville for the first round of the playoffs. The downside is that on that last play I turned my left ankle. The trainer packed it in ice and said to keep it iced all night. I did that. Davy woke me up ever two hours to tell me to get fresh ice. It still swelled some but really isn't all that sore – well, not unless I try to use it!!! Hmmm! Davy stayed in his chair all day running errands for me here in the house, as he put it. Sammy – the trainer – stopped by to take a look just before dinner. He thought it was coming fine. Said to switch to a heating pad. I wonder what excuse Davy will fine to wake me up tonight. I know he's really just taking care of me. I shouldn't put him down that way.

I think I figured out maybe why Grace was so reluctant to agree to go out with me – become my girlfriend, really, I guess is what I mean. She's had a couple of boyfriends before, but for some reason they didn't turn out to be very good relationships. She says she really didn't like them – like maybe they didn't treat her right. She'll never have to worry

about that with me. I'll always do my best to treat her right. That's what you do with things that are as precious as Grace is to me. I think I love her.

We talked about kissing again and we agreed that we're ready to do that now. She will bring me home after church on Wednesday evening and we will kiss then. I've been going over and over it in my head. I hope I do it okay. Okay, nothing! I want to do it GREAT! I suppose it's like most things – you get better at it with practice and I'm VERY willing to practice for as long as it takes. I get nervous thinking about it. I haven't said anything to Davy. He probably just assumes we're already kissing. I'm sure he's kissed some girls even before he knew their names. He and I are different in that way. I just shivered thinking about it. I better think about other things or I'll never get to sleep.

Davy just brought me glass of water and re-wrapped my ankle with the heating pad. I think it's time to put him to bed before he spoils me rotten. So much for his careful wrap job.

I got Davy settled in for the night. He said he hates to go to bed now because he feels so helpless there. In his chair he has some independence and he can do things for the rest of us and help out around the house. I told him when he was in bed he was supposed to be sleeping, not worrying that while he was sleeping he couldn't be doing stuff. It brought a faint smile. It was that kind that said, "Thanks for trying, but you really can't know how it is."

I can't of course. I wish I could. I'd trade places with him in a second if I could. I can't do that either, of course. I wonder if I'll ever get over these terrible feelings of guilt. Part of me hopes they will soon be gone. Another part of me thinks they should stay with me forever – it's the least I deserve for what I did. Maybe I should talk with Pastor about it all. That's a good idea. I feel better about it already.

We just got word that Grandma and Grandpa are coming down from Springfield for Thanksgiving Day. They are always lots of fun. It will be the first time they have seen Davy since the 'accident'. Mom told me she has filled them in on his progress – or lack of it – so they will be better prepared. Mom and Dad both get the day off. Mom took Friday off as well.

Davy and I both get a four-day weekend. I have to work at the vets Thanksgiving morning so her regular help can have the day off. That's ok. Another twenty-five bucks for me and I know Grandpa will want to come along. I like to have time alone with him. When we were little kids we'd each get a week with them alone. It was always a great time and made us each feel pretty special. Now I realize that we 'got' to go alone because we'd have been too big a handful if we'd have been there together. Oh well. It worked out great for both of us.

The school counselor – Mrs. White – came to visit with Mom and Dad and Davy about next semester. The school would really like to have him back full time if he can take it. They'll assign a teacher's aide to be with him all day as long as he's in the wheel chair. His tutor would still come once a week to help out, too. It seems to be what Davy wants but he has some problems about it, too. He says he'll be like the "Freak on wheels," and he hates that. He hates having to have a "baby sitter" go with him everywhere. He has been making jokes about giving beautiful girls rides on his lap. That really doesn't sound so bad to me either – well, it wouldn't if I didn't have Grace. (Nice save, Adam!)

Everything eventually gets back to Grace. I hear that's a sure sign of love. I believe it. I wonder how it will be being with Grace this week at school, now that we've decided to kiss. I wonder if she's as excited about it as I am. I wonder if it makes her nervous. I wonder how we will start. I wonder how I'll know when we're done. So many wonders and just think, by this time Wednesday night I'll have all those answers. Life is good, great even – except for . . .

"Love you Davy."

"Love you Adam - you no hustle slug."

I threw my pillow at him. Wish I hadn't. It'll come at me like heavy artillery when I'm least expecting it. Oh, well. I did get a direct hit on his ugly face!

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19TH

This has been another one of those wonderful/terrible weeks. There seem to be more and more of them. Maybe

weeks have always been that way but I have just begun realizing it.

My sprained ankle turned out to be no problem at all. After a weekend of pampering from Davy it hardly hurt at all by Monday morning. I've started calling him "Doc". He loves that, I can tell.

On to the bad news. Jakesville beat us in the first playoff game. I need to back up. On Tuesday Coach called a team meeting at noon. Team meetings are almost never to deliver good news. This one sure wasn't. He announced that four members had been kicked off the team ("removed from the roster," as he put it) for drug use. Three were seniors and one a junior. The biggest loss was our kicker. The others weren't starters but they represented much of our bench strength. A running back and two very good, big, linemen.

I spent the week practicing field goals and Jose worked on punting and kickoffs. It didn't make kickers out of us, of course, and really, just kept me from keeping that edge I needed in my two main positions. Jose only had to kick off once – the first play of the game – because we never scored. He had to punt seven times (for a total of less than a hundred yards). I tried three field goals but they all went wide left. Bottom line, 45 to Zip!

It made a total of five guys who left the team because of drugs this season. I wonder if they feel any responsibility to the rest of us or the school – any guilt over what happened to us because of them. I suppose it's easy to just blame them for the loss but we had beaten Jacksville before. At half time, Coach said that we all knew what was happening (he meant we were getting our butts whipped good and proper and there was nothing we could do about it.) So, he said, "Just go out there and have fun the second half."

Yeah! Sure! Have fun. It was my last game ever and we were helpless to do anything – even Coach had given up. I wished he hadn't said what he said. It still bothers me. I told Davy and he said instead of stewing about it I ought to go talk to him. I think that's a good idea. I'm going to do it next week. Coaches shouldn't give up, or if they do they sure shouldn't let the team know it.

BUT THERE WAS SOME GREAT NEWS! Grace and I

kissed. It was fantastic! I've never been so nervous in all my life. We had decided ahead of time when we would do it. We were parked in her car at my place and we both knew why we were there but for some reason we just talked. And then we talked some more and some more and some more.

Finally, after twenty minutes of us stalling, I leaned over to kiss her. My heart was thumping. We brought our faces close, looking at each other's lips as if we were afraid we might miss if we weren't extra careful on the approach. We both closed our eyes. Kissing her lips was definitely more fun than just kissing her hand – which I'd been doing off and on since we got in the car.

The first one was short – just lip to lip for a second or two. It was great – more, I guess, because it was Grace and I who were kissing than any really great feeling. I'm not sure how to say that. I guess I don't have to. Being there together, holding each other close, sharing our first kiss – all of that went into making it great – that's what I'm trying to say. We kissed a few more times and then just sort of stopped. We decided that our kissing would be a private thing between us – not a big public show like lots of the kids at school did. We want it to really mean something between us. We don't ever want it to become just like saying, "Hi" or "Bye". I'm very sure I love her. We need to talk about that. We talk a lot about our relationship. Maybe too much, sometimes, but I'm really glad we can always talk things out. I think that's how it should be.

Grade reports came out Friday. Davy did better than he's ever done in his life. He looked at the sheet for a minute and then turned it over and said, "Who the heck do these grades belong to, anyway." Four "B's" and one "A". It's always been more like three "C's" and one "B" or "D". I think it really proved something good to him about himself – his brain I guess you could say.

I did okay myself – three "A's" and two "B's". I know I can bring up at least one of those "B's". Davy and I have never been competitive about our grades but I saw a glint in Davy's eyes, which told me he was at least wondering if he just might not be able to do as well as I do. I hope he can. That would be pretty cool. Can you imagine how proud Mom and Dad would be if we both brought home cards full of "A's"?

Tomorrow I start working Sunday mornings in addition to Saturdays at the Vets clinic. She's letting me give medications and this morning she showed me how to change bandages. That's really gross but it's part of the job. I seem to need a lot of money all of a sudden. Fifty bucks a week should go a whole lot further than the twenty-five I've been making.

Thursday is Thanksgiving so we get a long weekend.

Tomorrow afternoon Daunte and I are going to hang out. He lives in a little town about fifteen minutes away and his mom will bring him here and then pick him up. I think we'll go biking. Davy says we can borrow his bike. His eyes got all damp when I asked him about using it. I didn't mean for that to be so hard on him. I guess I didn't think. Probably, even if I had thought, I wouldn't have thought it would affect him so. I don't know if was because he was afraid he'd never be able to ride again or that he missed our rides together. Maybe he was a little jealous of Daunte. Don't know if I'll talk to him about it or not. If it's important to him he'll bring it up.

Davy found out I used my car fund to buy him his wheel chair. I didn't ask how, but I suspect it was Mom. He's always been able to get stuff out of her. He has entirely too much time on his hands just to sit around and think. I'm sure that's why it came up. He got to wondering how expensive it was and how we could afford it.

Anyway, he put me on the hot seat the other night. He asked me why I hadn't got my car yet. I said they'd gone up a lot since I started saving and I still didn't have enough. It was all true but not really being honest with him.

"Oh, I heard you already bought a vehicle," He said.

"What?"

"I hear it's called a ZX-400 Wonder Chair."

"So, you know. There's really nothing more to say."

"But you gave up your car. You've been saving for it forever."

"Look at it this way," I said, trying to put a positive spin on it. "You're soon going to be done with it. We'll trade it on an old Jeep and do the trails down by the creek."

"What if I never part with my old ZX?"

I wasn't sure how to respond. Was he saying he

thought he'd need it forever or that it had too much sentimental value and he didn't want to give it up?

"Sorry about that, Adam. I guess I'm sort of down about things. Nothing good has happened for weeks – my legs I'm talking about – and I guess I'm discouraged."

"I can understand that but remember the physical therapist said there would be peaks and valleys in your progress. So, you've been in a valley for a while. That only means there's bound to be a peak coming up any day now."

He nodded and smiled, then said, "One thing's for sure, now, I guess."

"What's that?"

"I guess I'll have to let you use old ZX here anytime you want to take her for a spin."

What he was really saying was, "Thanks." I understood and he knew that I did.

"Love you, Doc."

"Love you, Adam."

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26TH

Lots of good things. It was good to be out of school for a couple of days. It was good to have Grandma and Grandpa here. It was good to have some private time with Grandpa at the Vet's office. He loves animals and pitched right in to help. I asked him if he'd ever made a really, really, big and bad mistake in his life – not meaning I wanted him to tell me what they were. He understood. I asked him how he handled it. How he lived with himself. He said a wise man was once asked how he became so wise. He answered by saying he had been fortunate enough to make many mistakes in his life and to learn a good and lasting lesson from every one of them.

What he was saying, I think, was that even the worst of mistakes have an upside – the lessons we can learn from them, if we will just take the time to think it all out. He knew I was talking about Davy's accident. Everybody knew he got hurt after I hit him. Nobody but Davy and I knew what had really happened. Grandpa didn't ask but I know he understood it was something more than the story being told.

Grandpa never pries. He's always willing to talk but he never tries to put me in a corner with questions that will make me uncomfortable about things like that. Someday I may share it all with him – someday after I've discovered what good lesson it has to teach me.

Grandma was her usual bubbly self. She brought enough goodies to last until they come back at Christmas – cookies, brownies, home-made peanut brittle, apricot sticks and I forget what all. She portions it out in a half dozen metal cans – the pretty kind with lids – not sure what they are really called. She tapes a date on top of each one – the date we are allowed to open it. Sometimes – well, often, to be truthful – we get into them too early and there's usually a note inside with some comment on it about opening it too soon. She knows us pretty well, I guess.

The two of them usually seem to know just what we need. They proved it again by bringing Davy a puppy. It isn't just any puppy but one Grandpa found in a park where it had been abandoned soon after it was born. It's head and eyes are huge compared to the rest of its body and its skin is still hairless and wrinkled and it sounds more like a baby chick than a dog when it yips or tries to bark or whatever they do at that age. It's chubby. I think Grandma has been over feeding it. It waddles when it walks. Nobody has any idea what kind it is. Probably a mutt. Grandpa said that was appropriate for a family of mutts like us. He was referring to all the different strains in our own background – English, Irish, Italian, Danish, German, Russian and even a little American Indian.

It took to Davy from the moment Grandpa placed it in his lap. It was humorous. It sniffed the arm of the chair first and then Davy. Then it went back to sniffing the chair as if it liked the chair's smell better than Davy. They brought a couple of huge eyedroppers to feed it milk. I got an artificial nipple from the Vet's office that works a lot better – looks like a turkey baster with a little rubber deal with a hole in it at the end. It got the idea immediately and now it only takes a few minutes for it to get full. He takes lots of care – just what Davy really needs right now – something to make him feel needed and useful. At night, it sleeps in Davy's wheel chair. Oh, it starts out in bed with Davy but by morning it's always

snuggled up in a corner of the seat of the chair. I believe it thinks the chair is its mother – I do. It follows that chair everywhere and when it stops the puppy curls up by a wheel and waits until it moves on.

Davy named him Wrink – because of his wrinkled skin. Another interesting development has accompanied Wrink's presence. As puppies will, Wrink gets hungry during the night – between two and three a.m. like clockwork. He begins whining. The development is this. Davy rolls himself out of bed and pulls himself up into his chair, the pup jumps up into his lap and they go to the kitchen for a snack. Then, he reverses the process and always ends up back in bed in the morning. The first time I heard him doing it I sat up in bed and said something dumb like, 'what you trying to do, kill yourself?'. He told me to go back to sleep. Said he didn't want anybody to watch him. I always know when he's doing it but I never let on. I just watch to make sure he's okay. I've decided that Davy will make a very good mother someday. (Ha! Ha!)

Actually, I have really mixed feeling about it. On the one hand, I'm happy that he's taking the responsibility and wants to do it himself and that he's discovered he can take care of himself as well as the pup. On the other hand, to see him struggling to drag himself across the floor and then pull himself up into the chair is such a sad thing – a sad thing that I'm totally responsible for regardless of what anybody including Davy says. I'm having a really hard time finding that good lesson Grandpa said should come from it.

Davy gave the blessing at our Thanksgiving dinner. He listed all the things the things he was thankful for – most of them pretty predictable – but at the end he said, "And thank you for this challenge that will give me the opportunity to grow in character and in faith." We all cried together. I've always been the religious kid and he's been – I'm not sure how to describe it. He just sort of tagged along to church and Sunday school with no real commitment – apparent commitment anyway. What he said just shocked me, I guess, is what I'm trying to say. I didn't expect him to think that way.

Enough of that for now, though I am probably not going to be able to just ignore it for long. I'll corner him about it

sometime. It's how I am. I'm not like Grandpa in that way. If I have a question I ask it. I like to know what's up – what other people are thinking about things – about me in particular I guess.

Grandma and Grandpa left about five – it's a two-hour drive. They called a while ago to say they were home safely. It was really funny. Davy answered the phone and it was Grandma – she always makes the calls – women and talking you know. Anyway, he was in his chair munching on a brownie from the can that wasn't to be opened until December tenth. Just out of the blue she apparently asked him if the brownies were as good this year as last. Without thinking he said, "Oh, yes. Better even, I think. Wooooooooooops!"

We laughed 'til we cried. Grandma's something else.

We never knew our grandparents on Dad's side. They had passed away before we were born. Dad came along very late in their lives – good for them, I'd say. He has two brothers – our uncles – that we know pretty well. They are old and more like a set of grandfathers than uncles.

I've always been comfortable around old people. I guess Davy has too. When he was four, somebody asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up. He thought for a minute and then said, "A grandmother." I've never let him forget that of course and have on more than one occasion sent him a card on Grandparent's Day.

Guess I better hit the hay. Sunday mornings have become really busy. My job at the vets; then an extra-long shower to get the 'farm scent' off me; getting Davy cleaned up and dressed; and then reading the Sunday School lesson over all before nine thirty.

We used to go out to eat after church but we don't do that anymore. Nothing's been said but I'm sure it has to do with the financial pinch we're in.

"Love you, Davy."

"Love you, Adam."

"Love you, Wrink."

"Yip. Yip. Yip!" (Davy's stand-in response for the pup.)

DECEMBER

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3RD

Back to some old business. I didn't talk with coach. I decided it had really been my problem. I've always just played sports for the fun of it. When little league stopped being fun, I quit (at the end of the season). I just let myself get way to serious about that Jacksonville game. I'm kicking myself for it now because I really didn't have any fun in the last game I'll ever play. Davy says it has a lot to do with my disappointment with the guys who got kicked off the team. I suppose that played a part. They really let us down and that did – does – bother me. When you take on a responsibility like being on a team, it's like giving your word that you'll do your best to help the team. Those guys are trying to tell everybody that what they do on their own time should be their own business. It's like they are trying to make it Coach's fault for following the conference rules – rules that are intended to help keep kids sound in mind and body. They make me sick. Maybe it's their parents who are making me sick for not teaching their kids about responsibility to others or even to themselves. I guess what's done is done and I should stop obsessing over it.

Good news from Davy's doctor. Dad took him back down to the hospital for his 'thousand-mile checkup', as Davy put it. The Doctor was really up-beat about his progress. He's going to start therapy out at the Easter Seal Center. He'll be doing exercises in the pool and some with an electrical gadget that is supposed to help his brain relearn how to make his legs work. It all sounds good, I think. Davy has taken it on as a big

challenge. He joked that even if it doesn't help he'll at least get to see his physical therapist in her bathing suit three times a week. He's hoping for a bikini. What a kid – Davy not his therapist – although I have volunteered to take him to the Center in the hopes I may get a glimpse or two.

Daunte and I had a really good time Sunday afternoon. We rode all over town. I took him down to the Vets place and introduced him to some of my 'patients'. We went to Jefferson School and shot some hoops. We haven't done that for quite a while. It was fun. I fed him at Brenda's Bigger Burgers – THE BEST burgers in the entire world – galaxy, even, probably! We sat outside there and talked for quite a while. Next semester he's going into some kind of a work study program where he will be in school half days and then out working – for pay – the other half. He seems excited about it – well, as excited as he gets about anything.

We came back to the house and sat around in the living room with Davy while we waited for his mom. Kurt stopped by and the four of us had a good time together. Silly guy stuff, mostly, but fun. We got to talking about building a side car for Davy to haul his girls around in. That led to a set of jet engines to handle the extra weight, and eventually a set of retractable wings so he could do some high-altitude kissing. The absurd just kept getting more absurd. We laughed till we cried. It was really good. It seems like a long time since I did that with friends. I'm beginning to see that the past couple of months have probably been harder on me than I've let myself believe.

I'm worried about Davy, of course. I'm also worried about Mom and Dad – not just the huge debt this is bringing on them but the emotional toll it's taking as well. They must be so terribly sad and worried about it all and yet they always present us with a smile and words of encouragement. I have both the worry and the guilt-thing to deal with – guilt about Davy and about the huge debt I caused for my parents.

I stayed after church Sunday and talked with Pastor for quite a while. I just laid it all out to him – how I really had wanted to hurt Davy in retaliation for him taking my girl – who really wasn't my girl, of course. We talked about jealousy and how it's normal for siblings to feel that way about each other from time to time. He agreed with me that I had used a terrible

approach to handling it. He asked if I had intended to cripple my brother for life. I said, no, of course not. I just wanted to make him really hurt for a little while. He reminded me about the teaching of our religion that goes something like, "forgive those who have trespassed against us ..." He said 'those' refers to ourselves as well as others. I have to forgive myself the way I'm willing to forgive others. That helped me a lot. Pastor is a wise man. I wonder what huge mistakes he must have made on his way to wisdom! (Smile)

Friday night Grace and I are going out on a date – dinner and a movie. I'm really looking forward to it. She sang at church today. She has a beautiful voice. I love to hear her sing. I like to sing, too, but it's not what you'd call one of my best talents. She is really great. We like the same kind of music and lots of the same artists and groups. I hoped we could go out this evening but she had made plans for a 'girl's night out' with Amber and another friend – another old girlfriend of Davy. I can only imagine what they had to say about us. There is one good thing in it for me. I haven't kissed either of the other two so at least they can't compare me to Davy on that score. The other two will probably have notes to share on Davy's puckering prowess. I wonder what girls do talk about when they are together like that. Guys tend to lie a lot about what they do with girls. I wonder if girls do the same. I doubt it. The way they like to talk, though, I'll bet they share lots of things we'd rather they didn't. I haven't done anything with Grace I'm ashamed of. We've agreed that kissing and holding each other close is as far as we are going to go 'romantically', but still I think that should be private. I think she does, too. But then, girls may define 'private' in a different way than I do. I trust her judgment, but if it comes up, I hope she says I'm a good kisser.

That's a strange concept – 'good kisser'. It's easy to define things like 'good receiver' or 'good hitter' or 'good student' but I'm not sure what goes into being a 'good kisser'. I'll ask Davy.

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Interesting? I've never really seen that side of Davy before. I mean he talks like he is God's gift to women and that they should bow down as he passes, but that's really not how

he feels about it inside. He thinks a good kisser – boy kisser, I mean a boy who kisses a girl – follows the lead of the girl. If she keeps her teeth closed than the boy should too. If she touches her tongue to the tip of the boy's tongue, then he should stop at that. If she wants to do more, than he should follow her lead but NEVER force anything on her. He says keeping it comfortable for both partners is what's most important. I really can't believe my little brother is actually a sensitive kind of guy like that. It must work. Girls really seem to like to kiss him. What's even more interesting is that I came up with the same general plan on my own. Two great lovers in the same family – our parents must be SO proud! (Ha! Ha!)

Sometimes when I do something dumb and need to apologize to Grace I tend to keep apologizing over and over even after she says it's all okay. Davy says that's exactly the wrong thing to do. He says never, never, never, ever bring something like that up after the girls agrees it's been settled. In the first place, it's like a put down to her, like you don't really believe what she said to you about it. In the second place, there is no reason to keep reminding the girl of the boy's dumbness – enough of that seems to just happen all by itself. Davy blames his male hormones. He may be right. I know the 'boy' in me really wants to do things sometimes that my brain knows I shouldn't – mustn't. I keep telling myself I will control that but then it happens again. Nothing really bad but just pushing the limits a bit now and then. Enough about that or I'll have to go take a cold shower. (That's definitely a dumb expression and in my experience, it really doesn't help!)

"Love you, Davy."

"Love you . . . hot lips!"

(At least I had the good sense to keep my pillow to myself this evening!)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10TH

Davy has really taken to the Easter Seal Center. The folks out there are all so great. He likes the pool. For his therapy, they work his legs by bending them at the knees and forcing them up against his abdomen. It seems pretty rough

to me but I'm sure they know what they're doing. After the first few sessions his groin really hurt – where his legs attach to his abdomen. His reaction to the pain was, “Fantastic. It hurts like h-e-double hockey sticks.”

When he's done (when they're done with him, actually) they let him just swim for a half hour. He's always been a good swimmer and he has kept his arms and upper body in such good shape that he swims better without his legs than most folks do with them. He asked if we could start going back to the Boys Club and swim one or two evenings a week. That sounds good to me, though I've never been much in the water.

It wasn't a bikini but most any swimming suit is better than her usual baggy jeans and oversized sweatshirt. There really is a girlish figure underneath all of that – I mean REALLY there IS! At one point, she put her hands on her hips and shook her finger at Davy – they were in the pool. She said, “If you don't stop trying to look down my suit, I'll turn you over Stan Gronski. She pointed to a three hundred pound, six foot six, offensive line type man in his mid-thirties who smiled a toothless grin in Davy's direction. From then on things immediately improved between them.

The rest of his therapy is a combination of electrical jolts to his muscles and him trying to support himself between two rails by making his legs lock at the knees. Then he sways his body from side to side and tries to move along the path between the rails. It didn't go at all well the first few sessions but this morning something seemed to click. It really tires him out (to which he says, “Fantastic,” of course.).

We had an interesting conversation this evening. I told him how proud I was of him and figured that would be that. But he came back with, “I'm really proud of you, too, you know.”

I had no idea what he meant so, being me, I asked, of course.

“I know how hard it is for you to see me in all the pain that goes with the therapy. But you've stuck with me through every groan and every tear.”

“It's what brothers do,” I said.

“Oh? Remember when I got that humongous splinter in

my leg when we wrecked our toboggan the winter we were five and seven. As I recall when the doctor began cutting it out of me you fainted dead away, hit your head on a table, and required five stitches in your scalp.”

“I was seven for goodness sake. Give me a break, Grandma.”

He smiled and nodded. I did the same. Later, I went into the bathroom and pulled my hair apart in search of the scar. It's there, alright. Hope I never go bald. If I do, I'll just have to concoct some very macho lie about how I got it.

Davy's stashing away lots of money from his box making job. On several occasions, he's tried to force it onto our parents but they won't take it. They say it's their place to care for their children and that's that!

At supper tonight Davy announced he was taking us out for dinner after church tomorrow and, “if we all behaved ourselves like good kids,” he would consider making it a regular thing. I looked at Mom and Dad and together we said, “Catfish Hole.” It's Davy's favorite place. He nodded and grinned. When he was younger he'd get in trouble there for juggling the hush puppies and trying to grab them out of the air with his mouth. I fully expect a repeat tomorrow.

I like my work at the Vet's clinic more every time I'm there. Enough that I asked her for any literature she has about becoming a Veterinarian. She had some for me and gave me addresses where I could get more. She seemed really pleased that I was interested and certainly did nothing to discourage me. I took that as a sign she thought I might have it in me. It's a long time in college but then, it's just one thing I'm thinking about. I can't pay for college the way things are now so, I'll have to start investigating alternatives.

Off season baseball conditioning begins for me this week. I thought about going out for basketball but I'd be a bench warmer and it would take up so much time. This way I'll be home by four every afternoon. Last season I was mainly a relief pitcher. I always had a couple of good innings worth of fast balls and we didn't lose a single game due to any of my innings. I brought us back to win six times. I'm proud of that. Coach said if my arm could take it he'd like me to try starting this season. It will be strange pitching to somebody other than

Davy. He's already just about the best catcher our school's ever had. He has an arm that can always beat a runner trying to steal second. I asked his physical therapist this morning what she thought about him catching practice pitches from me. She said it was up to him. If it didn't work she was sure he'd let me know. (Yeah! Sure! This is Davy we're talking about!) Anyway, there's one problem. His chair sits too high for him to keep his glove in the strike zone. We'll have to invent something else for him to sit in or on. Maybe one of the old bean bag chairs we used to have in our room. I took then to the attic when we moved stuff up there before he came home from the hospital. That may not give him enough back support. I don't want my fast balls to knock him over (though the image that creates is really humorous.)

Christmas is just a month away. Hardly seems possible. Second semester will be here before we know it. I hope Davy can go back to school. I know he has mixed feelings about it but I also know it will be good for him in the long run. The baseball coach has already said he wants him to help out with the team. I don't know what that means and I hope it can be something more than just bat boy. I suppose I should talk with Coach more about it.

I suppose – no, I know – our Christmas will be pretty simple this year. We all understand that, and it's okay. Let's see: Davy's recovery or a bunch of presents. It's no contest. Our parents never went overboard at Christmas like lots of them do. We'd both get some clothes and a couple of games or toys. It helped us learn to take good care of what we had. I think they've done it just right. Family and friends are what's really important – not stuff. That's how I'm going to raise my ten kids, too. Davy says never to tell a girl I want ten kids or I'll have to invent a way to have them all by myself. I love kids. I know it probably won't be ten. I only want as many as I can take good care of, and raising kids today is a pretty expensive proposition. Just one tragedy like Davy's and an average family could be wiped out. I really do love kids, though.

Davy's asleep on his back. Wrink is asleep on Davy's chest. What a pair. I don't want to wake them so I'll just write it tonight – Love you, guys.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17TH

It was the greatest thing and the scariest thing that's happened to me in a while. I should back up. I've moved up to the top bunk so we can store things on the bottom where it's easier for Davy to get to them. About five this morning I was still asleep, on my back. I felt something at my ear and it woke me up. I opened my eyes and looked out into the room – well, that had been my intention, anyway. There beside me was Davy's head – just floating there – big as life and smiling that impish grin of his. He had been blowing in my ear to wake me up.

"How? What? How?" I mumbled.

"My brother the great public speaker," he said teasing about my confusion.

I rolled over onto my side to investigate further. Somehow, he had pulled himself across the room and up the bed posts and was standing there, holding onto my bunk with his knees locked just like he did it at Easter Seal.

"That's great, Davy, but may I ask why you chose to do this at five o'clock in the morning of the only day I get to sleep in?"

"Look outside. It snowed. I knew you'd want to pull me in our sled like you did when we were little kids."

"Oh, you did, did you?"

He made his famous puppy dog eyes and well before I had dreamed of being awake, let alone freezing my toes off in the snow, there we were like when we'd been five and seven. I have to admit it was great fun. Then he wanted to make Angels in the snow and insisted that I move his legs to make it complete. I did but it made me feel bad. It clearly made Davy feel great so I tried to put my feelings aside.

We don't have many days of snow here in Arkansas so kids have to make every one count. Before seven o'clock we'd built a little snow man complete with stick arms and gravel eyes – couldn't find the more official looking coal. We were sitting on the back porch remembering about when we were younger. Mom brought us each a cup of hot chocolate. She hesitated and together Davy and I said, "Come and sit with us a while." It's what she was hoping for. We had a good

time. She remembered some things we'd forgotten and we remembered things she'd just of soon not known about. It's a miracle we reached our teen years considering all the dumb stuff we used to try. We laughed a lot – the three of us – and that was good.

Mom brought up something I guess Davy and I had each been thinking about but hadn't mentioned. Every Christmas we take toys and books up to the homeless shelter in Bentonville. We've always put back part of our allowances all year to cover it. Allowances had to stop when Davy got hurt so our funds are pretty low. I have saved some from my checks but not a lot. Davy announced that this year he had it covered and made it all seem okay by pointing back to the years when he was still real small and sometimes only had been able to save a dollar or two all year. Mom and I understood how important it was to him so we didn't even protest. We decided that we'd do the shopping together Wednesday night after church. Davy already had lists of things he thought kids would like this year. Mom would call the shelter on Wednesday morning and get a tentative count of ages and such so we could plan our shopping. Of course, the way families moved in and out of that place, it always changes by the time we arrive. We always had back up in case there were more kids than we'd been told about.

The first week of conditioning went well. It's mostly a different set of guys than were in football. I had it a lot easier than those who had let themselves get out of shape. By Thursday there was so much moaning and groaning that coach said the locker room sounded like Happy Acres Retirement Home. I talked with the Coach about what he had in mind for Davy. He wants him to work with the new kids who want to be catchers. He'll be good for them and they'll be good for him, I think. I haven't said anything to Davy yet. I figure that should come from Coach. I'll take him by after school next Thursday on our way to therapy.

I talked with Davy about catching for me when I practiced around here and his face lit up. He's been working on a drawing of some contraption he thinks we can build that will support him at the right height and all. Maybe there will be time to get started on it this week. It seems that life is really

full all of a sudden. I figured once football was over I'd have lots more time. I usually take Davy to Easter Seal and that's a couple hours three times a week. Then there is my time with Grace.

She's asked me come to her church on Wednesday nights. Mom says that's okay but I'll have to pay for the gas. It's about a gallon a round trip. Grace says that will be cheaper than going out to eat in order for us to be together. Who knew that going to church could save you money. She understands that money is hard for me to come by right now. She says she just wants to be with me and that doesn't have to cost money.

I haven't written a whole lot about her the past few weeks. There have been so many other things going on. She has become the most special person to me in my entire life outside of my family. I think about her all the time. I wonder what she's doing just about every minute we're apart. I think we're getting really good at kissing. She says so, too. I suppose the only thing that counts in things like that is that both she and I think it's great.

Kissing is strange, you know. I mean, think about it – two people pressing their mouths together and making primitive sounds. But, let me tell you, the description of the act doesn't reflect in any way the wonderful experience it provides for the participants. It's so hard to describe. It's a kind of special sharing, I guess. I suppose it's dumb to be trying to describe kissing to a journal page when that journal page will never get to do it. I suppose it's dumb to be writing about anything a journal page will never be able to do. I suppose it's dumb to be talking to a journal page in the first place (no offense, Journal Page).

Wrink has quickly worked himself into our family. He's really grown since he arrived. He still doesn't like it when the wheelchair is out of sight. Mom says when I take Davy places with it, Wrink just roams around whimpering as if he's trying to find it. I guess we all miss our mommies at that age. Ha! Ha!

Grace and I talk on the phone for about an hour every evening. Grandma and Grandpa got Davy and me each a cell phone last year for Christmas. We have to share minutes on the plan, but so far it's worked. Now that I'm talking with

Grace so much I have to keep closer tabs on how much I'm using it. Minutes add up in a hurry when the love of your life is at the other end of a conversation. The present was for one year so I suppose come this Christmas Davy and I will need to begin paying the bill ourselves. Probably about sixty dollars a month I figure. That's about equal to one day's work for me – for my share. I need to make a budget, I guess. Davy's always had a weird budget. He spends what he has and then does without until he finds a way to get some more money which he then spends until he runs out again. Not much planning ahead in his financial scheme. I have the idea that has all changed now – like so many things have for him.

“Love you, Davy.”

“Love you, Adam.”

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24TH

We've been on Christmas break all week. Mom took one of her vacation weeks to get ready for the holiday. Grandma and Grandpa came down yesterday afternoon and will stay until Monday noon. We used to always give them our room when they came and we did the sleeping bag thing in the living room or down in the basement. With Davy needing his special bed still, that's not a possibility. Since the grandparents really aren't of the sleeping bag generation, they got a room at a motel a couple of blocks away on 6th street.

Like most families, I guess, we have our Christmas traditions. Christmas Eve we snack on sandwiches and wonderful homemade, junk food. Then we "sing" carols while Grandma plays the piano. I put sing in quotes because some – many, even – might not call what we do 'singing'. At any rate, we make a joyful 'noise' with the best of them. Then we each get to open one present from under the tree. The rest we open on Christmas morning. Until Grandma and Grandpa arrived there weren't really very many packages. That changed in a hurry. Grandpa backed into the drive and Dad and I helped him unload the trunk. They went all out, I guess, figuring things would be pretty tight around here this year.

After the package opening, we always have hot mulled cider and more junk food – Mom made a DELICIOUS

raspberry frozen dessert (or is that desert, I'm never sure. In this case I mean the cold one not the hot one.).

Speaking of hot ones, I've seen Grace three times this week – less than when we're in school but for longer times. I guess that equals out. I helped them put up their tree last week – think I forgot to mention that here last time. It's more girlie than ours but then I suppose that's to be expected with three to one girls there and three to one boys here. They have little dolls and flowers and crystal bells. We have tiny airplanes, Santa's, reindeer, and dozens of handmade ornaments that Davy and I made when we were younger. We laughed 'til we cried trying to figure out just exactly what some of our earliest attempts might have been. One of Davy's looked a lot like a six-inch-long red and gold centipede. (I really bugged him about that! Ha! Ha!) One of mine resembled nothing ever seen before on the face of this planet. That confirmed Davy's long held contention that I was from some far distant place in outer space. At that, I had to attack him and was soon straddling him, him on his back on the floor. Before I could really get a good tickle going, he reached up, grabbed my sweatshirt at the shoulders, and flipped me over his head across the room. He has REALLY been building his upper body – more than I realized, though I can see from looking how his muscles even seem to have muscles now. We all laughed. Mom clapped. Dad slapped his knees. Davy turned over onto his stomach and did his, "gotcha, gotcha, gotcha," song while shooting me with his index fingers. Grandma and Grandpa held each other on the sofa and looked around as if expecting the ceiling to fall in. (They had three girls so weren't used to such goings on.) I laid there on my back in excruciating pain – I'd lit on one of Wrink's toys. We all laughed 'til we cried – well not Wrink. He stood on my chest and licked my face – I think he liked the salty taste of my tears. That only caused more laughter.

My back still hurts but I can't admit that, of course. Big brothers don't dare admit to pain inflicted by little brothers. Except for this lingering agony, I'm really tickled about what Davy was able to do. I imagine he was as surprised as I was but then, it's also a rule that little brothers don't dare admit such first-time accomplishments are anything but routine. It

just may be that my tickling days are over. Another era passes away into the ever-broadening shadow of time. (You and I understand that, even if nobody else does – right journal? Geez! I must have hit my head as well. There I go conversing with paper again.)

The snow was gone by Sunday morning so I'm glad we had fun in it on Saturday. The snowman finally melted away on Friday. It made me wonder if Davy and I would ever play together in snow again. Who knows where I may be next winter. Home for Christmas, at least, I hope.

The first semester is finished. We went on line this afternoon to get our grades. We both got four A's and a B. Davy hasn't stopped grinning since he found out. It's the first time he's ever done as well as I have – grade-wise. I think it's great and I think it stinks. Well, not really, I suppose. It's just that everybody in the family always knew I was the smart one and Davy was the jock. Wow? You know, I did so well in football this season that now we're both jocks – and smart. Things change I guess. (I suppose THAT'S an understatement, isn't it?!)

The physical therapist said the next step (so to speak) for Davy will be crutches. That will be a red-letter day for sure. She didn't give him any idea when that would be. He's doing real well in all his new activities at the Easter Seal Center.

On Tuesday afternoon, we went to the Boys Club to swim. We had to talk the lifeguard into letting Davy prove himself in the water. He raced a kid known to be a pretty good athlete and beat him by four yards over the length of the pool. The lifeguard took off his whistle and handed it to Davy. Just playing but I thought it was a really nice way of telling Davy he was welcome to swim anytime.

The kid wore me out. It was lots of fun and once the other guys figured out Davy was every bit their equal in the water they stopped treating him any differently than they ever had. At one point three of his friends ganged up on him and dunked him – I mean to-the-bottom-of-the-pool dunked him. Eventually his head popped to the surface wearing the biggest smile I've ever seen on the kid's face. He looked right at me. It said something like, "They're treating me like they used to – like I am just like them. Isn't that great!" I had to agree it was.

Luckily my face was wet. I'm still just enough into the macho thing that I don't like other guys to see tears on my face. It was a good experience for all of us.

In the morning, he'll have us up before sunup. That will probably always be his 'job' on Christmas mornings. The youngest kid wakes everybody up. I'm glad some things don't change. I heard him telling Grandma to expect his call at the motel about five. He wanted to be hearing the crinkling of presents being unwrapped by five thirty. Who would have ever believed that 'always late for everything Davy', would be putting the rest of us on a schedule?

I must admit there is still a part of me that gets little-boy-excited about the prospect of presents on Christmas morning. It really isn't what they are, you understand; it's just knowing that I have such loving people in my life who care about me.

Mom needs a new Sunday dress – she hasn't spent a dime on herself since – well, just since. She likes to wear dresses to church so I had Betty, her best friend, go with me and pick one out for her. It's light blue with a white collar, belt and trim. Betty chipped in and got her some blue shoes to match. I would have gone with white myself but Betty says there is some feminine law of nature that says white shoes are forbidden in the winter. Good to know I suppose – seems really dumb but then I've decided, being a male, I'm never really going to understand a lot of things that just seem obvious to females. It probably works in the other direction as well!

I got Dad a new shirt and slacks for work. The seats of his pants are all wearing dangerously thin. I got Davy a new pair of shoes. I thought it was time to let him know I had faith that someday soon he was going to walk again. I got him some other fun stuff but the shoes are my most important statement for him this year. He will understand.

I got Grace a necklace and earrings set with her birthstone - amethyst. I also got her a long, green, winter scarf and matching gloves. I'd have liked to have got her the moon, you know, but I promised myself that someday when I could, I'd get her something out of this world. I know that what it is doesn't matter as much as that it's from me, but still. . .

When you love somebody so much you just never want to stop giving her wonderful presents.

Davy just told me to go to sleep so he could wake me up early without feeling guilty about it. Yeah! Right! Davy feeling guilty about inflicting discomfort on me! And there really is a Santa Clause!!!!

“Love you, Santa’s little helper.”

“Love you, . . . Darn it. I can’t think of anything!

“Try my name.”

“No thanks. I prefer my own.”

(I always play right into his hands! When will I learn?)

SATURDAY DECEMBER 31ST

Lots and Lots to write about this Saturday night. Actually it's 2:00 in the morning of next year – January first, is what I mean. Back to Christmas.

It turned out to be one of the best ones I can remember. It was calmer – less frantic – I guess. We took turns opening packages and that way it was like we all got to enjoy everybody's presents with them. It was like a room full of adults for the first time. I'm really not ready to be an adult yet. Still, it was pretty nice. Davy and I got several gift certificates for CDs and clothes and things like that. We each got a sweater from the Grandparents. Good for dress up, I guess. Church. They always get us sweaters and books. Mostly clothes from Mom and Dad. Everybody seemed to really like what I got them.

Grace and I exchanged gifts after Church on Wednesday evening. Reading her eyes when she opened my present (and from the length of the goodbye kiss later on!!!!) I got the idea she REALLY did like what I got her. She got me two shirts and some PJ's. One shirt was blue with mountains on it and the other yellow with long sleeves. The PJ's were striped.

It's just been Davy and me around the house most of the week. Three times to Easter Seal and three times to the Boys Club to swim. Doc Cavanaugh – our local, family, doctor, says Davy is ready to go back to school. They will

work out a five-period schedule for him with a lay down break over the lunch period. Mom is really nervous about it. Dad seems okay with it. Our paths won't cross much at school but he'll have a full-time aide with him so I'm not real worried. Davy's supposed to meet him on Tuesday morning. School begins again on Wednesday. I'm looking forward to getting back. I can't believe it's going to be my very last semester in school – like I said, I think I'm resisting the growing up thing.

It was good to just have time with Davy this week. It's not that we chattered all the time – we did our own things lots of the time – but being together was really good. We built the contraption he designed so he could begin catching. It came out not only looking good but it actually works. It's like a wooden captain's chair that a bean bag chair fits into. It all snugs up around him and stabilizes him. I suggested a seat belt but he thought that would restrict him too much. If he falls out he knows how to get back in, I suppose. Then it has – what would you call them – ski-like things front and back and side to side. He calls it his spider chair. The skis support it so no matter how he moves it can't tip over. Ingenious, really! We've used it every day since it was finished. His problems with his legs haven't interfered with his ability to catch. Of course, his lack of mobility makes him useless behind the plate in a game situation. He enjoys doing what he can. I can tell he has plans to find some way to get out of his spider eventually. For the time being, it's great to be back pitching to him. I think my arm is going to be up to the starting job this season. I'm going to work it an hour or so every day pitching – in addition to the conditioning sessions at school. I feel stronger than last year. Davy says he can tell I'm throwing harder. I guess we'll see.

Amber comes over every day and the two of them sit on the back porch – no girls allowed inside when a parent isn't here. Their relationship seems to be progressing just backwards to me. I think you should be friends with a girl first – to make sure you have things in common. Then you move on to the romantic things like kissing. For Davy and Amber, it was more like, take time out from kissing once in a while to see if they might have enough in common to be friends. I sound like I don't approve of my brother's approach and I

guess I don't. I'm not sure if I'll talk to him about it. What's been done has been done, I suppose.

Yesterday afternoon Kurt came over and stayed with Davy while Grace and I took Alyson bowling. For a little sister, she can be a pretty cool kid when she decides to be. We had a good time. Grace really likes to bowl. I haven't done it much but can see that I could come to like it, too. I'm not very good yet – a fact that seems to delight the two girls! Grace is very good and I guess Alyson is, too, for her age. Two things I know for sure; I was there with the two prettiest girls in the whole place, and they both have excellent taste when it comes to choosing their male escort. (Ha! Ha!)

It was without Davy's knowledge that I had asked Kurt to come and be with Davy while I was away with the girls. We haven't left him alone yet although I know that's just being overprotective on our part. He's perfectly capable of doing everything he needs to do. He can get up into and out of his chair by himself. It takes forever but he wants to do it so the rest of us have learned to be patient and just plan more time for it. Friday night, just before we went to sleep, when I said, "Love you, Davy," he said, "Love you, too, but kindly cut the babysitter crap."

He had seen through my 'clever' plan. I didn't respond but I knew he was right and he knew that I knew he was right so words weren't really necessary.

Tonight - well, last night – New Year's Eve – we had a party here at the house to see in the new year. It was just four couples but we had a great time. Grace and me, Davy and Amber, Kurt and Rachel, and Jenny and Brandon. We played music and danced – yes, Davy whirled around the floor in his ZX like he'd been dancing in it forever. We don't have a big house so Mom and Dad mostly stayed in their room. They'd come out, every once in a while, just to let us know they were there and that was okay. All the kids think our parents are pretty cool. They also know what's expected of them when they are here. No booze, drugs, or tobacco and making out goes no further than kissing and holding each other close. I think it's good to have the limits understood like that. It lets us just relax about 'things' and have a really great time. We laughed a lot. We danced a lot. We ate a lot. And, we kissed

a lot. Everybody laughed their heads off the one-time Dad and Mom fast danced. They were really good though I must admit none of us had ever seen those exact moves before. The good thing about our parents is that they let our friends know they are always welcome here and that they like them. Kids find them easy to talk with – well for short periods of time, anyway – and they never try to – what's the word – intrude on our time together. Again, I brag, but Davy and I were pretty smart about choosing our Mom and Dad!!!!

At midnight, we blew those silly noise makers that look like long, curled up, tongues and then shared kisses with our special partner. By 12:10 all of us had come up for air except Davy and Amber. By 12:30 everybody had all left. Davy and I spent a half hour cleaning up the house. It's taken us this long to wind down from the party. We chattered like squirrels about it all for the past hour and a half. It really tired Davy out. I know it did because he asked me to help him get ready for bed – something he's been priding himself on doing alone the past month. I was glad to help, of course. He's my brother. He went to sleep immediately.

Grace and I had a fantastic time together. It's really the first time we've kissed that much in front of other people, but it was a special situation that made it okay. Heck! It was the first time we've kissed that much, period! It was so great to just be able to hold her close and kiss her any time I wanted to all evening long. I didn't want the party to end. It did and here I am with all those wonderful memories to relive over and over again. I'll tell you one thing, snuggling up to a pillow is NOTHING like snuggling close to Grace!

JANUARY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 7TH

It was back to school on Wednesday. The special van with the lift gizmo from the Easter Seal Center is picking Davy up in the morning and bringing him home after school. I'm not sure how we will work the after-school thing once conditioning actually turns into practice and Davy will need to stay later. I'm sure we'll find a way. I could tell that Davy was pretty nervous about going back – I could tell because he kept saying he wasn't!! After the first day, all that had disappeared. He misses his tutor. They became very close. He's a great person and an excellent teacher. He'll still come by on Thursday evenings for an hour to help. Davy doesn't think he'll need it. We'll see. Anyway, they enjoy checkers together.

I was hoping he'd wear the new shoes I gave him but he wore his beat up old Nikes. I won't say anything to him, of course. There was one unexpected problem. It was the first time Wrink had been left here without anybody in the house. Dad decided he needed to stay in the basement – he hasn't had an accident for a long time but with the change in routine around here Dad thought it was best. It appeared that he stayed on the top step the whole time we were away. His food and water hadn't been touched down stairs. He was really glad to see Davy (and his four-wheeler Mama!) when Davy opened the door after school. Next week we're going to try leaving him in the bathroom. It's lighter in there and he's more

used to it. He likes to jump into bathes with Davy so it should be more comfortable for him.

Bad news for Grace this week. She brought me home from church on Wednesday night – our family's vehicles were both in use. After she left here, she stopped at the bottom of the hill – half a block or so from our front door – and then pulled out to turn onto the main road. A car came around the curve – much too fast, I'd say – and the two cars shared a little fender paint between them. I heard the screeching tires and the thump and I ran down the hill just in case it had been Grace. Nobody was hurt, thank God, but fenders and bumpers didn't fair so well.

Grace was shook up – naturally, anybody would have been. The other driver was nice about it all. I'm just glad everybody was okay. She came up to our place to wait for her Mom to come and get her. Her car will be in the body shop for a week or so. That means her mother will be taking her to school. Her parents are being really great about it. I hope it doesn't raise her insurance too much.

My first week of school was okay. There will be a lot of reading in English Lit. I lucked out and got good teachers. That will be a good way to end high school. I still hate to think about that. I guess the unknown is sort of scary. I've always handled new things well, so I'm not sure why I have this uneasy feeling about it. After all, I've spent thirteen years in school just waiting for the day I'd be out. I hope I've learned the things I'm going to need to know. A student just has to trust that the school system knows what's best. I really didn't have much say in what I was being taught.

I've been going on-line and finding out about some colleges. I'll probably end up going here in town. Mom and Dad say I can live at home just like in high school to save on room and board. I'll still have to find a way to handle the tuition and books. I have to make some decisions in a hurry. Time is running out for making applications. Not sure why I've been dragging my feet.

I've been trying to talk Daunte into coming out for baseball. He's better than he gives himself credit for. He hits and fields well. He says a kid trying to make the team for the first time his senior year doesn't stand a chance. I say that

he'll never know if he doesn't try. So far, he's been a tough sell, but I won't give up. His new job – the work-study thing – may not give him time. He didn't mention that. I almost never see him at school this semester. I guess we'll have to make time to get together on the weekends. I invited him to our New Year's Eve party but he's not much into dating yet so he declined. I didn't press because I figured he might be uncomfortable with all the romantic stuff going on.

Davy and I haven't missed a day of doing our pitch/catch thing – even in the rain. It's really important to him. Well, I didn't mean it wasn't important to me, too. I think it's the one time every day that he feels – what? Whole, maybe. Like he can do what he did before. I know he likes the idea that he's helping me – and he really is. He sees things in my pitches and wind up nobody else ever tells me about – things to change and things to keep. He's really a big help. I think he'd make an excellent coach.

He's been moaning a lot in his sleep at night. That makes me think he's in pain and that could be good or bad I guess. Good if he's beginning to feel things he hasn't been able to feel before. I told him about it and he said he'd tell his physical therapist. I don't know what she told him. He's doing really well on the rails at the Easter Seal Center. He can move right along and keep his knees locked. She says that indicates good progress. Mom says the first doctor that treated him told her that he would make 99% of his progress in the first six months. She didn't tell Davy because she didn't want to set any limits that might discourage him. He has about two months to go. Davy says his goal is to be able to run around the track at the football field on the day he graduates. If anybody could ever come back from what he's been through and be able to do that, it's Davy. He keeps bugging his therapist about when he's going to get his crutches. She comes back with, "When I say you're ready." He grins and nods and then ten minutes later asks her again.

She modified his rail training last time we were there. Now, he holds on to the bars, moves his legs forward and stands on them, then moves his hands forward – letting go as he moves his hands from place to place. It means he really is supporting his weight on his legs, now – at least during that

short time that he's shifting his hands forward on the bars. He fell three times during the session but that didn't stop him. He'd just say, "oops," pull himself back up to a standing position, and take off again. He's got more guts than anybody I've ever known.

I forgot to write about the Christmas presents for the kids at the homeless shelter. I'll try to remember tomorrow night. It was another fantastic experience. Davy and I have never had a lot of extras but compared with them we've lived like kings. It's sad to think about how little some folks have. The kids didn't do anything to deserve that kind of a life.

I'm pretty well sapped so I'd better stop. My brain just keeps churning on tonight. It's been a great year and it's been a terrible year. My hope is that this next year will be tilted a lot more toward the great than the terrible. It will be a year of tremendous change – Davy getting fixed (that didn't come out right!) and me leaving high school behind for some unknown undertaking. It's a scary time for both of us.

“Love you, Davy.”

“Love you, Adam.”

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14TH

Before I forget it I want to remember about the homeless shelter. There were seven families there – only one with a father. There were 16 kids – two of them teenagers, boys. They were so embarrassed to be there and to have us see them there but it didn't take long for the team of Adam and Davy to handle that. We, like, made them the two Santas for the little kids. We held back their presents 'til last. It wasn't much but you should have seen their faces. They each got a shirt, a pair of jeans, a portable CD player, and three CD's. We got six different titles so they could trade with each other to get more like what they wanted. That was Mom's idea and it turned out to be a good one. One of the families had left before we got there so we had three extra presents. I suggested that the kids draw numbers to see who got which one of the leftovers but one of the girls – eleven, maybe – suggested that we just leave them at the shelter for the next kids who came. There were a lot of wet, grown up eyes, I'll tell

you that.

We spent about twenty dollars on each kid. More on toys than clothes for the little ones and more on clothes than toys for the older ones. While we were shopping for the teenagers Mom pulled out a fifty-dollar bill Grandpa had given her for us to use. It's how we managed the CD players. Most of the rest of it came from Davy. I had about a hundred to contribute. It was worth every penny. Sorry I didn't have more.

About a week later we received a big brown envelope. Inside were thank you notes from all the kids. It wasn't about being thanked and at first it irked me a little that they thought they had to thank us. Mom pointed out that while we need to give, they had a need to thank, and we needed to respect that. She usually has a way of putting things in perspective like that. I'm glad she said it. Now I'm irked at me that I hadn't seen that myself. Parents have to be so wise. I wonder how that happens. I sure hope it happens before I become a parent. Can you imagine trying to raise kids without it?

Grace was a little sore for a couple of days after the accident but she's feeling okay now. For some reason neither of the drivers was issued a ticket. I think the cop realized the other driver must have been going way to fast around the curve and came upon Grace's car before she had a chance to see him. With no way of proving that, he decided not to ticket anybody. She's a little nervous about driving again, I think. I'm sorry it had to happen when she was dropping me off. That's not the kind of thing you want to have a girlfriend remember you for.

I've been helping her with her chemistry. I'm amazed at how much of that stuff I actually remember. It makes me feel really good to be able to help her and I think she's impressed with how much I know about it. (At least I'm going to believe that!)

She is so sweet. I am really lucky to have her in my life. I am so lucky I was too pigheaded to give up on asking her to go out with me. She agrees with me on that. Davy calls me 'the old married man.' I guess that's because I talk about her so much and wonder about her so much. He says no matter what subject he and I start talking about I end up

saying something about Grace. It's probably true. I do think about her all the time.

Dr. Baker, the Vet I work for, gave me some applications for scholarships for pre-veterinarian students. It would help with my tuition even before I get into Vet school. They all require a recommendation from a Vet and she says she'll write me a good one. We get along really well and I can tell she thinks I'd make a good Vet. I know I would have to really apply myself to my studies. I'm no great brain. I mean I can do well but I have to really study hard. I'm not sure I want to do that for the next seven years and do without having the stuff I've always dreamed of having – a car, apartment, stereo, jewelry, great clothes, and things like that.

Davy and Wrink are doing 'their' exercises. I'm up in my bunk and they are on the floor beside Davy's bed. He wanted 'real' barbells so I brought ours up from the basement. (One more set of junk to step over here in this little room. He does curls with the smaller ones (about twenty pounds each). Looks like he has 55 pounds on each end of the big one tonight. Add in the weight of the bar and he's benching 155. BUT, what I was getting to is this: He fixed a shoebox so it's suspended by string below the cross bar in the center of the barbell. Wrink gets into the box and seems to really enjoy going up and down as Davy exercises. They make quite a pair – I call them Wrinky and Stinky – but only when I'm out of pillow or shoe flinging range. He talks to Wrink like it was two old ladies catching up on all the local gossip. Wrink just lays there taking it all in and perking up his ears every so often as if part of that part of the conversation contained really juicy stuff. Getting him the pup was a fantastic idea. Wrink is a lucky little canine.

The cat from next door is not quite so lucky. His name is Tom (how original!) and Thursday after school while we were playing Horse, Davy backed ZX over Tom's tail and broke it. The dumb cat just sat there as dumb Davy backed over it a second time trying to get away so I could take a look. I have to admit we laughed 'til our sides hurt even though it really was a serious matter. I put Davy and the cat into the truck and we went to the Vet's office. Davy explained to Dr Baker what had happened and through her own smile and

uncontrollable chuckles she said, "Shame on you!" The inconsistency in the two messages made it all the more hilarious.

Bottom line to this 'tail' is that Tom now sports a splint on his wagger, wrapped in tape, and signed by every kid in the neighborhood (Guess whose idea!). Mr. Johnson, the cat's owner, has been very understanding and even came up with a rather clever pun himself. He said, "That should teach the old boy not to 'paws' beneath a four-wheeled vehicle."

If I can tear the Wrink/Stick pair away from the barbells, I'll get Davy settled in for the night. I'm tired. Tomorrow Grace and I will get to spend almost all day together – well, from ten or so until about eight. I'll go in to work a little early to make sure I have time. I still usually go to church with my family but Grace is singing at her church so Mom said I should be there. One more thing that's changing – where and with whom I go to church. It's funny, really. I always wanted things to change but now that it's happening, I'm not so sure it's all that great.

“Love you, Stinky.”

“Love you, Married Stiff.”

SATURDAY, JANUARY 21ST

Wrink has made a new friend – Tom, the tail-crippled kitten from next door. An unlikely pair but they do seem to have one important thing in common – the taste for tape. Between the two of them they had Tom's splint removed before sundown of the second day. Davy found pieces of the tape – autographed, so it left little doubt as to its origin – in Wrink's bed (glad it's being used for something!) I re-taped it once and talked to Dr. Baker about it. She said animals typically try to get rid of things attached to them that way. It was why she didn't put it in a cast. She was afraid Tom would break his teeth trying to get it off. She said there were really only two alternatives at this point: let it be however it would be or chop it off just above the break and make a bob-tailed cat of him.

I spoke with Mr. Johnson and he said to just let it be.

The tail now turns off to one side at a sharp angle at the break. Davy says if Tom were a geometry student he'd probably say he had 'acute' tail. (The puns just keep getting worse and worse. Tomfoolery, you might say.)

Grace got her car back. Looks good as new – the car not Grace, well, I better not say that. She was a little reluctant to drive it again. I told her the dumb story about getting right back on the horse after it threw you off. She rolled her eyes as if she couldn't believe I'd actually repeat such a tired tale, but she drove and now is feeling pretty good about it again. She's a good driver but just needs more experience to feel confident.

I began working a full eight hour Saturday at the Vets, today. It was unbelievable how fast the time passed. I'm giving dog bathes now in addition to lots of other things. When I got home, Wrink smelled me and began growling. Apparently, he doesn't want any canine competition. After my shower, he seemed to be less agitated. I took that as a good sign. If a dog couldn't smell anything then I must have got clean enough. I also did some work in the records, pulling cards on animals that were due for a checkup or shots, and then filled out postcards to be sent to them – well, to their owners. I told Dr. Baker that it would be pretty easy to set up a tagging system for all that on the computer so we could just run a 'find' once a week and print out mailing labels for the animals who were due to be seen within the next few weeks. She said for me to go to it, and set aside an hour every Saturday for me to work on it. That made me feel so good – that she liked my idea and had faith in my ability to do it. It will save hours of work every month.

School is good. I'm glad it is. I want to leave high school with a really good feeling about it. If I can just have a good baseball season, that should help make it happen. Of course, there is Davy's injury that will probably always dampen my memory of this year but I can't change that. I'm still pretty much in control of the other things – grades, baseball, friendships, and my relationship with Grace. Well, I don't mean I am the one in control of that relationship but that it's my responsibility to do my part to make it and keep it wonderful.

Davy has adjusted to being back in school. Some kids still give him the 'pity poor Davy' looks but they are mostly the ones who don't know him very well. His tutor got him one of those bike horns with the rubber ball on the back that you squeeze. We mounted it on right side of his chair just beneath the armrest. I often hear him tootin' somewhere down the hall even when I can't see him. I'm sure the principal isn't really happy about that but so far hasn't said anything. His aid – helper person – is Josh, in his mid-twenties. He's taking two classes at the university. He and Davy have hit it off great. He's come over twice to shoot hoops with Davy. That shows it's more than just a job for him. He's a great guy.

Davy's had to cut back on his box making – still doing it, but quite a bit less. He says he can't understand why they force us to go to school seven hours a day when he was able to do all the work in three hours at the most when he stayed home. It really is an interesting question. Maybe someday students will do most of their school work on line. Then who supervises them at home with both parents working? Why am I worrying about this? Why am I writing about this? Why am I? Now, there's a great question to ponder, but some other time.

Davy asked me for some help with his algebra so I guess I'll cut this short and see what he needs. It's almost a first – All Knowing Davy asking big brother for help with his school work. Maybe now that his grades matched mine he doesn't feel inferior in that area anymore. Maybe it's because we've grown so close the past few months. Maybe it's just because he needs help with his algebra. (Smile)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28TH

I can't believe that this will be the last time I will write in January of this new year. The month has gone by so fast. Life has become so busy that I'm having less and less time to write. Grace and I always spend time together over the noon hour at school. That's good. I look forward to it all morning. I see her between most of our classes. It's like my whole existence revolves around seeing her. I guess you could say it is a wonderful complication in my life. We still just kiss in

private – mostly. It's not that we don't want to kiss more often but we believe that kind of affection should be private between the two people.

Davy and Amber are continuing to grow closer, I think. He talks about her with respect and tenderness like I've never heard from him before. (Of course, he talks about Wrink in those same ways, too. Maybe there's more to Wrink than I realize. HA! Ha!)

The four of us are getting together at Grace's house for an End of January party Sunday afternoon. We were all moaning about having to wait 'til Valentines Day for the next special time, so we just invented a new holiday – at least a new reason to party. I get that from Mom, I suppose. She and her friends invented a "Birthington's Washday" in February (rather than Washington's Birthday). If the nice weather holds (it's been in the sixties all week) we will grill on their patio. If not, I suppose it will be burgers from the broiler in their kitchen. Mom said she'd make potato salad and baked beans for us to take. Davy offered to bring a truckload of chips and dip. Grace's mom is furnishing the burgers. The girls will provide the music and beauty. (Wrink will stay home crying for his mama and big brother!)

We all like each other and get along really well. We can talk about important things together and just enjoy our silliness – and there is always silliness.

I guess I have to begin thinking about Valentine's Day. I'd like to do something really special for Grace. Never having had a special person before on Valentine's Day, I'm not sure what it should be. I may enlist Mom's help or even Grace's Mom's help. She always has good ideas. I feel really close to her. Davy teases that I'm really going steady with her whole family. So, what's so bad about that?! So long as their designated kisser continues to be Grace, I have no complaints.

I'm throwing pretty good. No, I'll just say it. I'm throwing great! I've taken it easy and worked up gradually. Don't know the speed of my fast ball, but I'm pretty sure it's the best on the team. Last year my curve and change up were my best pitches. It will be good to have three that I can depend on. Davy says they are all 'coming along fine'. From him

that's a big compliment. I continue to be amazed at how well he catches from that chair gizmo of his. He's reaching six feet to either side of his body.

I'm not particularly enjoying conditioning and weight training but it's part of the game. Coach thinks if I strengthen my thighs a little more I'll have a more stable wind-up which should lead to better control and fewer wild pitches. So, Davy keeps coming up with new 'butt exercises' for me. What a kid!

I have a huge American Lit test on Tuesday. It's a good news, bad news sort of thing. The bad news is that it will be really, really, hard – American existentialists. The good news is, that we will now be done, finished, completed, through, with American existentialists! (You can tell how much I've enjoyed them. I suppose enjoyment and existentialism just may be oxymorons.)

Next, we'll be spending a month on Mark Twain and his contemporaries. I'm looking forward to reading Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn again. Our teacher says Twain wrote lots more stuff than that, so I hope to read something brand new that I can actually enjoy. I have a term paper to write in there, too. The teacher's going to help us pick our topics this week. I want to get going on it because once baseball gets into full swing, time is really going to be hard to come by. I'm thinking about trying to show how the lyrics of the songs of Stephen Foster tell the real story of the southern United States during his time. I'm not sure if the teacher will consider 'song' as being literature. We'll see.

There's a loudmouth at school – Ray – who's really getting on my nerves. He makes fun of kids who are a little slow or odd looking. A regular bully – the rich brat kind of bully. He makes me sick. Everybody says just ignore him or he'll start getting on my case. It hurts me to see him hurting other kids with his abusive remarks. I think a person would have to be sick to enjoy making other people feel so bad.

“Love you, Davy.”

“Love you, Adam.”

(I waited for the zinger but none arrived. He must have a fever!)

FEBRUARY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4TH

Sunday at Grace's place was really nice. The day was beautiful – stayed about sixty-five all afternoon. Davy really didn't use his chair the entire time we were there. He sat on chair pillows he arranged on the stone floor of the patio where he could lean his back up against a flower box. Amber sat beside him when she wasn't waiting on him. Seeing them together for so long I'm convinced they have a good relationship going. It got 'cuddling cool' in the evening (thank you weather guy!). They have a small fire pit in their patio and we kept a little fire going after the sun went down. I like to watch the flames bobbing around as if they can't make up their minds just where they belong. I can relate to that, I'll tell you that for sure.

Grace and Amber sang for a while. Once in a while Davy and I joined in. We like to sing along and the girls don't seem to mind. That was really nice. We talked about lots of things: boy-girl stuff, money, happiness, the problems of the world, life after high school; even how we were going to be as parents. Everybody had their ideas about it all. I'm not sure any of us have enough facts to make good decisions about a lot of it yet. I guess that's one function of a discussion, isn't it – to help you realize what you still need to learn about.

Alyson saw us kissing and loudly expressed her displeasure at us. I know she has no way of really

understanding about how kissing is one of the ways older boys and girls express how fond they are of each other. I sure didn't at her age, I can tell you that for sure. It's one of the nice things that happens as we grow up and it can't be understood until we do grow up. If she can just be patient for a few more years, she'll get the picture. Her parents are probably hoping that takes a long, long, long time yet for her! Just kidding. I know they want their girls to be normal in every good way. I liked what her mom said to her. Something like; "Grace and Adam's kissing is their business not yours, just like who you choose to be your friends and what you enjoy doing with them is really none of Grace and Adam's business." Sometimes I get the idea she's a little jealous of me – like I moved into her territory and took part of her sister away. I suppose that's a normal reaction because that's just what happened. I know how hard it can be to share somebody you love so much. That may sound odd, but I think it's true.

Mrs. Wentworth (English teacher) Okayed my term paper project. She wants me to broaden it to include some of the poetry of the era. She jotted down some resources for me. I was amazed that she had all of that right there in her head. I've never been a big poetry guy but I guess we'll see what we'll see.

Davy is supposed to get his crutches Monday afternoon. He's been as excited as a kid at Christmas. I guess if I was honest I'd have to say that I am, too. It's such a huge step. If he can make them work – and I'm sure he will – the world will be his again. (I can see now how the therapy on the bars has been getting him ready for them.) He can go and do and explore and be about as independent as he wants to be. Why does that make me sad? Because he won't need me as much, I suppose. And Davy needing me to help take care of him has been handling lots and lots of my guilt about the injury. How am I going to handle it once he doesn't need my help? I remember from psychology that one theory about depression is that it happens to cover up guilt feelings – to keep you from thinking about the thing that makes you feel guilty. I can't let that happen. I have to find some other way. Davy says just stop feeling guilty. Yeah! Right! "I crippled my brother for life but that's okay!" I don't think so. He says

what's over is over and I have to just let it be and get on with things. He says whatever physical problems he has to live with are HIS not MINE to deal with. He's right but it all seems so unfair.

Don't get me started on fair and unfair. I've been thinking about it a lot since our evening at the homeless shelter. We've been there a dozen times before, but this year it really hit me. Those poor kids never did anything to deserve being in the dreadful situation they're in and yet, that's where they are. Then I think, Davy and I never did anything to deserve the home we've grown up in either and yet that's where we are with all the advantages that just fell into our laps because we were born to our loving, responsible, capable parents. How can our situation be fair when there is all the sadness going on around us? If I keep going down that path, I'll end up depressed for sure. How do grown-ups deal with all the upsetting things they see around them every day? I can't take care of every single person in need who crosses my path. How do I begin to select those I'll help and those I can't?

Well, that should be nightmare fodder. At least I have my loving family and my loving Grace.

"Goodnight, Davy."

"Arf! Arf!"

"Okay. Goodnight Wrink."

"Goodnight, Adam."

(Confusion, anybody?)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11TH

Davy wore himself out walking with his crutches Monday afternoon. He walked inside. He walked outside. He walked down the steps into the basement and then back up. By supper time he said his arm pits were hurting where the crutches touched him. Mom wrapped some old socks around them for additional padding. He stood up the whole time we did the dishes – I washed and he dried and put them away. He clearly gets a big kick out of being able to reach the upper shelves again. I told him I thought he'd grown taller.

I'm sure he has – maybe an inch or more – since his injury. He's nearly as tall as I am. When he was little and I'd beat on him for some reason or other he'd say, "When I get to be taller than you are I'll ... " do whatever terrible thing he could come up with on the spur of the moment. "Pound you into the ground," was his favorite. Ironic, huh? Look who pounded who into the ground.

I just imagine the old XZ has been retired. We'll see. Probably keep it around a while longer just in case – in case of what, I'm not sure. We got it second hand but in great condition. The folks out at Easter Seal say I should be able to get just about all my money back when we sell it. I feel uneasy about that. It will be like I really never used my money to help him, you know. Like I just loaned it to him. I'll have to think about that. It seems that everything I've been doing to help him is now being taken away from me and I'm feeling really . . . I don't know . . . empty, I guess.

Move on, Adam!!

I went out to eat with Grace and her family Tuesday evening; then, we went back to their place and watched a movie – sort of a chick flick I suppose but who cares so long as I got to sit close to her and put my arm around her. She'd hold my hand and put her head on my shoulder and I'd think things couldn't ever get any better than that. I know they will someday, but that was plenty for now.

Dad got a promotion at work. It sounds like a lot more work for just a little more money but every penny helps around here. I submitted the scholarship applications this week. Dr. Baker wrote a special note to go along with the one to the school she graduated from. She had me send it to the Dean instead of the financial aid office. She and the Dean seem to be good friends. Not sure how. I figure that can't hurt.

Grace and I had a what would you call it? It started out like a fight, I guess, but ended up like a misunderstanding that needed lots of making up affection. I like those kinds of silver linings. She overheard me talking with a kid at school and she thought I was saying how I liked it when Janet flirted with me – she's always flirting with me. Girls don't seem to understand how really hard it is for a guy not to at least pay a little attention when a girl does that. Janet really doesn't like

me. I think she just does it to get me into trouble with Grace. I'm not sure what I ever did to get her down on me like that. Maybe she does it just because she can. Anyway, Grace got all bent out of shape – jealous, I suppose. I explained what had happened and told her we either trusted each other or we didn't and it sounded like she really didn't trust me. I think that made her mad all over again. Women! They ask you to be honest with them but when you are they . . . But, since they are WOMEN, we guys WILL keep trying to work things out. I say work things out instead of figure things out because I'm not at all sure the two sexes can ever really, fully, understand each other. Once we accept that, life becomes immediately easier, I think.

I guess I'll find out tomorrow night at church how things are between us. She sounds fine on the phone but I like to look her in the eyes. Her eyes can't ever lie to me and my are they ever beautiful eyes. I like to look into them – study them. It's like I can see deep inside her and read her heart. I hope she can do the same with mine because I really do want her to know my heart.

I've decided what I'm going to do for her for Valentine's Day. First, I'm going to make her a special Card in the shape of a heart. I don't have all the details worked out yet but I want it to be just right. I want to make it for her because I think she will understand how much more special that is than just going out and buying one. I'm going to get her a friendship ring. I think it's time for that in our relationship. I will take her out for dinner and movie and a little bit of kissing. (That sounded like I was putting a limit on the amount of kissing. That WAS NOT my intention!!!)

"Goodnight, Wrink. Love you."

"Goodnight, Adam. Love you."

"Goodnight, Davy. Love you."

"Arf! Arf!"

(I think something went wrong, there, again.)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18TH

Davy's Easter Seal therapy has been cut back to just one session a week. She's given him some things to do at

home. For some reason, he decided he didn't want me to take him anymore. My feelings have really been hurt. For some reason, I couldn't ask him why. Mom takes him before school on Wednesdays. I always walk to school – it's only about fifteen minutes on foot. I figure it's good for my legs and wind. Davy and I always used to walk together. The year he started kindergarten Dad made me promise on my good name that I'd always protect him on those walks and never pester him. It actually got to be one of the best times in our day. But this year he's either been at home or riding in the Easter Seal van. Now, with his crutches he rides the regular school bus that stops at the bottom of our hill. I miss that time together. I wonder if he does. He's never said anything one way or the other. All of a sudden it feels like we are growing apart – rapidly! I hate that! I know it's my fault but still, I hate it. I wouldn't want to be with the guy who ruined my life either. It's beginning to really get me down.

There is a highlight to talk about. Grace really liked what I did for Valentine's Day. First the card: I made it out of thick, soft pink, paper in the shape of a large heart. It used two sheets of paper and they were hinged together with colorful yarn. I wrote a poem to her and put it on the inside. I picked out a sterling silver ring. It sparkles just like her eyes. After dinner, we went to see a movie: Friday Night Lights. She thought the end was sad but liked it, I think. All and all it turned out to be a very special evening together. (By the way, she seemed to understand there was no intended limit on the kissing!)

I sort of had it out with Ray the Bully on Friday. He was making fun of one of the Special Ed. kids in the hall between classes. I went up to him and told him to knock it off. He said I sounded like a girl and that he'd talk to anybody, anyway, he pleased. I took another step toward him and he did the same to me. We were standing there almost nose to nose when Davy's friend, Kurt, came up and stood beside me. He put his hands on his hips and got right up in Ray's face. Ray curled up his lip and sneered at us and then backed off, turned, and walked away. The kid thanked us and went on into the classroom. I gave Kurt a slap to his butt and a quick nod. He did the same to me. Guys don't need words. He knew I'd just

said "thanks" and I knew he'd just said, "No problem, friend." It was over. Girls would have had to talk about it for an hour. That's not bad. I don't mean that. It's just one more way guys and girls are so different.

I talked with Dad about it and he said if Ray harasses kids regularly then I should go talk with one of the guidance counselors and leave it in his lap to deal with. I did and you know what the counselor told me. He said, "Well, you know Ray is the grandson of the school board president," as if that somehow gave him immunity from being a decent human being. If anything, I'd think it meant just the opposite – that he had a responsibility to demonstrate the positive side of being a human – a good citizen. I dropped it. We'll see if anything comes of it.

I have a good start on my term paper. It's probably the first one I've ever really enjoyed doing. It seems more like history. Maybe that's my thing instead of Veterinary medicine. It's like being a detective and searching the library and internet for clues.

Work is still going well. Conditioning is still going well. Davy still wants to catch for me every day after school so I take that as a positive sign in our relationship. He still talks to me when we're together like nothing's changed. I wonder if he doesn't see it or if it's just me looking at things all wrong. I don't know.

It's really tempting to use part of the money for the sale of Davy's wheel chair for the prom – I hear that's reallllllly expensive. I think, though, that I'll put the money back into my savings account – the one I set up for my car fund that now contains a grand total of fifteen dollars (the minimum required to keep it open).

"Love you, Davy."

"Love you, Adam."

(I wonder if he knows how great that is for me to hear. I wonder if it is for him, too.)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25TH

Not a good week! The deal at school is that Davy gets

out of classes five minutes early so he can get to his next classroom before the rest of the kids start stampeding through the halls. He doesn't have his aid guy, now that he's on crutches. Well, on Tuesday, on his way to English, he stopped into a restroom and who was in there but Ray. Davy said he began making remarks about his dangling legs and how no woman would ever want a cripple like him. Davy said he was just ignoring him and went about his business.

Then Ray said, "Look at me when I'm talking to you." Davy said something like, "Who'd want to look at your ugly face?" At that Ray kicked one of the crutches out from under him and Davy fell, hitting his head on the sink and knocking him out. You know how a forehead bleeds like a stuck pig, well, when the bell rang and other guys started going into the restroom there was Davy laying on the floor in a huge pool of blood.

The nurse fixed him up and sent him home for the rest of the day. He told her he fell – nothing about Ray. When he told me, I got so mad I was on the way out the door to find Ray and pulverize him. Davy called out for Dad to stop me and then we had this big family discussion about how we Carters solved problems and that beating someone senseless was NOT on our list of approved methods.

I agreed and calmed down and hoped that when I saw Ray at school I didn't just instinctively strangle the life out his scrawny, little, miserable, body. Kurt called me that night and we met at school early the next morning. We hatched a plan. I'm not sure either my parents or pastor would approve of what we did.

Ray's a hall monitor second period. His station is near the boy's restroom on the first floor. Kurt and two of his friends and I all got library passes that hour and converged on Ray from all directions, quickly moving him into the restroom. We backed him up against a wall – without ever laying a hand on him – and Kurt gave him a choice, of sorts.

He said something like: "Here's the deal Ray. You have a decision to make and you have about sixty seconds in which to make it. Choice "A": Get the beating of your life right now, which we guarantee will give you a free pass to the intensive care ward for at least two weeks. Choice "B": Cut

your crap – all of it. All the put downs you deliver to people all day long. All the abusive remarks you make to the less fortunate kids that go to school here. Agree to never, ever, again, insult anybody, or that free ride to the bed with the ropes and pulleys will be yours. There's a second part to this one. You also have to agree to stick with the four of us before school and noons every day. You'll have just one job and that's to keep your mouth shut while you watch and listen to how we relate to other kids and to watch and listen to how they respond to us. None of us has much hope you'll really learn anything useful but we think we owe you this one chance to change yourself into a decent human being. You got all that straight?"

We stepped closer to him.

He remained quiet. Another kid came in – two hundred and fifty pounds of first string center on the football team. He saw what was going on – or at least what he thought was going on.

"Need any help? I got a fist that's just itching to close that vicious mouth once and for all."

"I think we have it under control, don't we Ray?" I said.

Ray nodded and nodded and nodded.

"Sixty seconds are up, old man. What'll it be – and, oh, by the way, if your Grandpappy gets wind of this, our side of the agreement – the civilized side of the agreement – is suddenly null and void. You won't want to come to school without your body armor."

I thought that was a nice touch. When I related it to Davy he thought it was a tad too much. He didn't say much when I told him and he never really agreed with what we did, but he gave me a long, long, hug.

Anyway, back to Ray the rat, Ray the roach, Ray the rancid road kill. He agreed with the second set of options. (Surprise! Surprise!) I'm not sure what I would have done if he hadn't. I'm pretty sure that by then my urge to maim him for life had passed. I'd have probably just walked away. The others were itching to throw some punches. I'm glad it didn't come to that. I don't know if forcing him to watch how normal kids get along with each other is really going to help but I figured even a kid as lousy as Ray deserved a chance at

turning himself around. I read in some superhero book – Tommy Powers, I think – something like this. "A bad guy defeated remains a bad guy. But a bad guy reformed can become a positive force for good." It's always stuck with me. It's what we're trying with Ray.

So far, we haven't been contacted by the principal or any 'authority' about our deal in the restroom with Ray. None of the kids are saying anything either, even though they all know about it. We get a lot of thumbs up from them as we pass in the hall. I think Ray thinks they're for him – about the change he's made in himself. It seems to make him feel good so none of us are going to tell him any different. Actually, he's not all that bad to be around when he cleans up his mouth. He knows a lot about computers – clearly more than he knows about people – but I hope that can change.

Davy finally stopped bleeding. He bled all over his pillowcases for three nights. Wrink seemed to know something was wrong and he stuck close to Davy all week. Speaking of Wrink, it's hilarious. He absolutely hates Davy's crutches. He growls at them and chews on them and on more than one occasion he's tried to drag them off and hide them. He's not about to let anybody replace his mama. He'll probably go through some severe form of withdrawal when we get rid of old XZ! I wonder if there are puppy support groups!!

"Love you, Davy."

"Love you, Bonecrusher."

MARCH

SATURDAY, MARCH 4TH

There's still no indication from the administration at school that they know anything about the Reforming of Raymond Rudolf in the rest room. If they do, they're probably just relieved he got out of it alive. The principal's daughter is a Sophomore. I'd have thought she'd have told him. Good for her if she didn't. Good for him if she did.

I have saved up two hundred dollars for Prom. Grace really wants to go. She, Alyson, and her mom have been showing me how to improve my dancing 'skills'. It was never anything I was interested in before Grace. Davy dances pretty well but he's just not my type. (Ha! Ha!) I think we'll do okay on the slow dances. (Grace and me, not Davy and me.) I'd like to take her in a limo but I know (and she knows) that I can't afford that. Mom and Dad say I can use the car if I wash it, clean it, and gas it. Seems like a fair deal to me. (There's that word again!)

I've called around about tuxes. I need to plan on about a hundred dollars there even for a simple, inexpensive one with shoes, shirt and tie. The tickets will be thirty and her flowers about twenty-five. That will leave forty-five for dinner. I need to get hold of some menus and see where I can afford to take her.

In one way – the biggest way, I guess – I really want to spend the money in this way. In a little way, I keep feeling guilty about doing it when there are so many kids for whom I could use that money to buy food and clothes and things like

that. Mom says I can't save the World all by myself and that I've worked hard for the money and should feel good about spending it on the prom. She says experiencing a prom is an important part of growing up in our culture. Through all of that, I guess I've convinced myself it's okay. I don't know what style or color of tux and shirt I want but I'm sure Grace will be happy to tell me. (Another Ha! Ha!)

I turned in the first draft of my term paper. She'll make some suggestions and then I can polish it up and off. I'll be glad to get it finished this early in the semester. Regular baseball practice begins next week. I feel like I'm really ready to have a great year. I hope I have the stuff to start. Coach likes his starters to have a solid six innings in them. I've never gone that far in a game but I have several times in intra-squad games.

I thought I'd never say this. I mean I really thought I'd never say this, but old Ray is turning out to be not so bad after all. His head is on just a little sideways but that kind of goofiness makes for fun. He still thinks he's some kind of student body hero for the change he's made in himself. It's comical and it's wonderful, I guess. At any rate, he really sees himself as one of the good guys. The kids he used to terrorize are relieved, I'm sure of that. Several have told me as much. Someday I really want to talk with him about what he thought he was accomplishing by being such an abusive jerk, but I don't want to risk breaking the spell so I'll wait until after graduation.

Dad gets quite a perk with his promotion – a company vehicle. That has freed up the pick-up so I can drive Davy and me to and from school. He's staying all day now – worked in a study hall between his last class and Baseball. It seems to be working okay. He claims he isn't tired anymore like he was at first. I guess we'll see once practice gets underway for real. I feel bad for him that he can't get a driver's license. I have this fantasy that if he never regains the use of his legs that we can get the truck fitted out with all the controls on the steering wheel. I don't know how expensive it would be but I see cars like that all the time.

Wednesday nights have turned into kind of a nice routine. I go to church at Grace's church on Wednesdays.

Before church, we either eat at her place, go out with her family to eat, or she and I go somewhere cheap for something. I like her little church. It's filled with friendly people who have just accepted me as one of them. It's very comfortable.

Davy isn't into what he calls middle of the week church or in "parting the week with pews." His religion is more a private thing for him, I guess you could say.

I helped trim my first poodle today at work. The groomer is a good teacher. I get along with her really well. She let me work on his tail. I was afraid I was going to cut it off with the electric trimmers. I didn't and it seemed to come through the ordeal in good wagging shape.

Wrink has moved from sleeping on the seat of the wheel chair to sleeping on the foot of Davy's bed. Let's see: Sleep on the spot where his butt's been all day or there on his bed beside his stinking feet. If I were Wrink I think I'd go curl up next to a crutch.

"Love you, Davy."

"Love you, Poodle-boy."

SATURDAY, MARCH 11TH

Lots of ups and downs this week. The ups can mostly be credited to other sources. The downs are mostly my own dumb doings. I'll just list them as they come to mind.

The letter Dr. Baker wrote to her old college must have really helped. I got a tentative acceptance into their pre-med program and an all tuition and fees scholarship on a year to year basis. The tentative part is that I have to end the year with at least a 3.5 for my whole high school career. I will, so that's no sweat. The year to year part just means I have to maintain a 3.33 average every semester to keep the scholarship. The college is in Indiana – hardly a live at home commute for me. Room, board, and books will fall on my wallet. I don't know how I can raise that kind of money. The school counselor says there are student loans with government guarantees that I can take out for that but then I'll have all that to pay off after I graduate. And, after I graduate, I'll be heading right into three years of Vet school. Lots of thinking to do on that. Maybe there are other scholarships or

grants. The more basic problem is I really don't know if I want to spend that much time in college.

We got our nine-weeks grades, Friday. Just like last semester we both got four A's and a B. I really want to bring that up to five aces by that final report card. I think I can.

We sold old ZX this week. The folks at Easter Seal were right. I asked them to price it for me. They added about ten percent onto what I paid for it and we got it without any haggling. So, more fuel for guilt. By damaging my brother, I boost my car savings fund by some three hundred dollars. I put it all right into my savings account not so much for the lowwww interest rate as to just keep it safe and out of my reach. That would go a long way toward room and board. Dr. Baker says North Manchester is a small community and I could walk anywhere I needed to go. I suppose I wouldn't need a car. My head is getting overloaded in the decision-making department.

Poor Wrink. He whimpers all night long now that the chair is gone. It's sad but it's so funny because he really did bond with that thing. Davy got him a stuffed puppy about half his size. They didn't hit it off well. New pup is now without a left rear leg. Maybe that was therapeutic for Wrink. Maybe he just wanted to replace the legs with wheels.

When I came home from work about five this afternoon, Kurt was pitching to Davy out back and that really threw me for a loop. Kurt will be one of the other starting pitchers this year. He was a Little League superstar. It bothered me so much I turned around in my tracks and came inside. Kurt saw me but Davy's back was toward me. I guess I have the idea that was supposed to just be something special between my brother and me. It has been up until today. I wish I wasn't such a jerk – I know that's what I'm being – but I can't seem to help it. I can't pull myself out of this 'funk' as Grandma would call it. I didn't say anything to Davy about it. He should be able to play pitch and catch with anybody he wants to. He always used to. He and Kurt have probably passed as many balls between them as Davy and I have. It's crazy. Maybe I'm crazy.

At least Grace and I are still good. I continue to help her with chemistry sometimes. She has a really big test

coming up and I know she's worried about it. I have an American Lit test next Friday. I should do well on it. Mark Twain, mostly. He wrote two absolutely hilarious short pieces I had never heard of before: The Diary of Adam and The Diary of Eve. I highly recommend them. They are short and part of one of his collections. According to Twain, men and women haven't had a clue about how to understand each other right from the very beginning. I'd like to think he is mostly wrong about that, but my experience makes me wonder if maybe he's at least partly right.

Baseball is going great. I guess I need to keep that in mind when I get down about other things. Our first game is next week. First conference game in two weeks. I think the team is coming together pretty good. Davy said he thought we were considerably better than last year and then added, "Except at catcher, of course!" He said it as a joke but it's the truth. Nobody has that home plate to second base arm that Davy has. I know he's missing it soooo much but, unlike Wrink, he never whimpers about his loss – well not where anybody can hear at least. He hasn't cried at night for months now. I don't know if that's a good sign or a bad sign. I still do, I'll tell you that.

Davy is taking us out for dinner tomorrow. It's become a family tradition I guess. I wish I could afford to treat everybody. Well, look at that. Guess who's jealous? I think I need a long, long, afternoon with Daunte. He always tells it like it is. I can count on him to set me straight. I'll try to work it out for next weekend. I feel better already.

"Love you, Davy."

"Love you, you mama-stealer."

SATURDAY, MARCH 18TH

I'll be eighteen in twelve days. I can still remember my first day of preschool like it was yesterday. So much has happened and yet it seems like no time at all has passed by. I suppose being eighteen will be better than being four – I guess I'm sure of that. I had a lot fewer privileges then, but I had a lot fewer responsibilities, too. I guess I'm willing to take

on the responsibilities in order to have the privileges. (I'm sounding like a lecture from Dad after coming in two hours after my curfew!)

Grace and I went and ordered my tux this week. It is black with a black shirt, and red tie, and cumber bun. We did it this early to be sure I could get one in my price range. We both think it's pretty cool. I just don't dare lose or gain much weight between now and then.

There was a big change in our room this week. We got rid of Davy's special bed and moved the things back that I'd taken to the attic. It looks huge with all that space the bed had taken up. I asked Davy if he wanted me to stay in the top bunk – it was always his – thinking it would be easier for him to get into and out of the lower one.

"Nothing doing!" he snapped back. "Your squatter rights don't count. You suddenly going to start treating me like I'm a cripple or something?"

I backed off immediately. There seemed to be a whole lot more emotion behind his remark than I thought was called for. Maybe some of his anger is finally beginning to come out. I hope it will. I can stand and take anything he feels like throwing at me. I will deserve every syllable.

Speaking of being ticked off, I'm still feeling that way about Davy not wanting me to take him to Easter Seal anymore. I can't figure what that's all about. We still go to the Boy's Club Tuesday evenings from seven to eight. He loves that. He is everybody's equal when he's in the water.

An interesting thing happened while we were there this week. A man who helps with some kind of "Olympics" for handicapped teens asked Davy if he would like to enter the swim competition. Davy's face got all red and he raised his voice. "I'm not handicapped. Can't you people get that through your thick skulls?" He swam off in a huff.

Clearly, it's been eating at him more than he's been willing to say. He's always been one to keep his problems to himself. As little kids, I'd have to drag stuff like that out of him. I knew I couldn't help make him feel better if I didn't know what was wrong. I guess this past week he's begun to show me some of the things that are stewing inside him. I'll confront him when the time seems right. Or, he'll begin listening to

himself and bring it up to me first. Either way, we'll handle it. We always have.

It's hard to believe that I've saved what I thought was the most important thing in my life (besides Grace) for last. Perhaps my priorities are different from what I thought they were. Anyway, we won our first game. It was non-conference but pretty important. If a team does well on that first one – playing together, making connections, anticipating moves, things like that – it's a real confidence booster. We did just about everything right so we came out of it very confident. I started and pitched seven solid innings. When he took me out, Coach said he thought I could have finished but he didn't want to risk anything. I understood. I was just pleased at how everything went. I allowed four hits and got four hits. We won five to two. Kurt replaced me for the last two innings and his only time at bat he hit a homer on the first ball pitched to him. He makes it all look so easy. Natural talent, I suppose. Then, again, seeing him in a pool you're sure he'll drown before he reaches the side.

Back to my birthday. I told my parents not to get me anything – that I really had everything I needed and I understood about the family finances. They nodded and Mom kissed me. What they were really saying was 'thank you but it's your birthday and you will be getting something'.

I aced the American Lit test. I've grown to really like my teacher. I just have to reformat my term paper – add footnotes and the bibliography – and I'll have that ready to turn in on Monday. Most of the teachers accept papers on floppies but she likes them printed out. Her age, I suppose. She grew up in the era of typewriters not computers. It's interesting to me that what was cutting edge technology in her day is now obsolete. I suppose that will happen to computers someday, too. I'm told that the man who invented the computer chip once said he hoped he lived long enough to see what magnificent device came along to replace it. I guess that's just how things go. Mr. Stevenson – he just had his 90th birthday – has lived from when riding horseback was the usual method of travel to see men travel to the moon and space probes actually leave our solar system. He's seen communication move from letters, to telegraph, to wireless, to

radio, TV, internet, and now wireless cell phones. I suppose my grandchildren will be asking me to tell them about the old days when we had to just use those old-fashioned cell phones to communicate.

“Love you Davy.”

“Yeah. Whatever.”

“Goodnight, Wrink. At least you still love me.”

SATURDAY, MARCH 25TH

I’m saving the best for last tonight. So, first . . .

I’m afraid Kurt and I created a Raymond Monster. He sticks to us like glue (one of our requirements, I know). He’s just always there every time we turn around. Kurt and I started splitting up at noon but somehow old Ray still manages to ruin both our lunch hours. I guess we’ll have to initiate Plan B – no wait, this was Plan B. I guess we’ll have to initiate Plan C. “C” for cut him off, curtail his association, cast him aside, crush him like a . . . I just ran out of alliterations, but I think I’ve made my point.

Somehow, he needs to cut the cord and get on with his own life. Perhaps he’s just punishing us for the way we handled him. That’s an interesting thought. Maybe Davy will have an idea.

Of course, Davy will have an idea. It seemed all plain and simple to him: Get Ray a girlfriend!!! He even reeled off a list of a half dozen candidates. We’ll get to work on that first thing Monday. The way he drools when a cheerleader walks by I’m pretty sure he’s in the market.

It’s good to have both of us back in the bunks. Davy gets in and out of the upper with virtually no extra effort. With his hands on the side rail he lifts himself up and above the mattress and then sort of curls over onto his left shoulder and ends up on his side facing out into the room. His legs just naturally follow his torso. He just reverses it for his exit. We had to put a big hook on the end of the upper bunk to hang the crutches from because Wrink was carrying them off during the night. He’s getting big. Before long he’ll be able to carry Davy off, too.

Not to boast but I'm hitting so well this season coach has been letting me play shortstop when I'm not up in the pitching rotation. My average over three games is .398 – not too shabby, I'd say. I'm slated to start in the game against Jacksonville on Thursday – my birthday. Not sure if Coach did that intentionally or it just happened. I'm already up for it. We're 3 and 0 on the year. By my next turn in the rotation we could be 5 and 0. Davy seems to enjoy his work with the Sophomore catchers. They sure like him. I think it's like a double-edged sword for him. On one side, he really likes helping the younger guys. On the other it just reminds him of how much he wants to be out there behind the plate. That's what he needs – a little more tension.

I turned in my term paper. That's the last big project of the year. YEAAAAA! We're into the more modern writers now. At least I know what they're talking about. Hemmingway, Steinbeck and the like. I have two book reports left. I think I'll read some Jack London.

Now for the BIG NEWS. This morning when I left for work – I usually take the truck – I went to get the key from the 'key board' by the back door. There was a new set of keys on a new red key holder. Dad was at the kitchen table drinking coffee. I took the keys and then turned to look at him – holding them out as my way of asking the question.

"Happy birthday, Son."

"What?" I mumbled not understanding at first.

"Let's see," Dad said beginning to tease me. "The lad is standing there with a new set of keys to the truck and his father just said happy birthday. Hmmm. Now what could that possibly mean?"

"The truck? For me? For my birthday? Jumpin' Gehosofats, as Grandpa would say. Really? Of course, really – you wouldn't joke about something like this. What can I say? Thanks. Thank you. Thank you soooooo much."

He stood and I hugged him. He walked out to the truck with me. Mom had put a humongous blue bow on the windshield. Her inside was cleaner than it had ever been since I'd known her. (The truck not Mom!) It's no spring chicken but it's good, solid, transportation. The first thing that flashed through my mind was, "How much will the insurance

be?” I didn’t mention that out loud, of course, but I’ll need to find out.

I can’t believe it. I have a vehicle! I called Grace to tell her the good news. She said, “I know. Who do you think helped clean it up?”

I had a hard time keeping my head on my work today. I went to the window and looked out at it a couple of times. I’m not sure why or what I thought I’d see. It does mean some more expenses but I can find a way to handle them. I’ve been gassing it for a long time. I know how to change the oil so I can save some there. Insurance will be the big deal. Dad called our insurance agent beforehand to get an idea. Looks like something between \$250 and \$300 a quarter. I could save a few bucks if I paid by the six months but I may not have that kind of cash flow. It’s paid up until July so I have three months to save up three months’ worth of insurance. A hundred dollars a month, twenty-five a week. My take home from the Vet’s is right at a hundred – a little less – a week. I’ll be okay. I get excited all over again every time it hits home that I REALLY HAVE A TRUCK!

“Love you, Davy.”

“Love you, Adam, the finest brother in the world with a new truck who’s just dieing to take me places in. Seriously, I do love you. Sorry I’ve been so jerky lately. Stuff, you know?”

“I know. Got some stuff myself.”

“Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.”

APRIL

SATURDAY, APRIL 1ST

Thirty more school days until graduation!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I guess I have to admit it; I'm eighteen. The future is now, as somebody once said and here I am. The truck, of course, was the big gift this year. Dad joked saying it was the gift for all of my adult years.

About three weeks ago, Davy asked who I wanted to invite to my surprise party and I named off a few folks including Albert Einstein, Bill Gates, and the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders. I figured we were just fooling around and it hadn't crossed my mind since. I pitched seven innings again in the game that afternoon and we beat the pants off Jacksonville – YES! I had them down six to one when I left the game and we won by six to one. It was all the birthday present I needed, I can tell you that.

After the game, I messed around the locker room with the guys, relived the game a few dozen times, showered, and by the time I reached MY truck I was still high as a kite and smelling fresh as a daisy. Davy had made other plans to get home that afternoon so I could take my time.

I waltzed through the front door wearing my mitt on my head (no idea why) and there they were: Albert Einstein (AKA Davy), Bill Gates (AKA Kurt - I wondered why he left in such a hurry after the game) and three of the most beautiful

cheerleaders – Dallas’s or anybody else’s – I’ve ever seen (Grace, Amber, and Jenny – who has hooked up with Kurt recently).

Mom and Dad were there of course and I received the customary, hands-held-high, “SURPRISE!” as I entered, feeling only totally humiliated as the unexplainable ball glove slowly slid down over my nose.

Where they found Halloween masks in late March I don’t know. It really took me by surprise. Instead of gifts, Davy fixed it so everybody brought money in anonymous envelopes for the homeless shelter. Pretty nice. We had a great time. They left about seven. Davy and I began cleaning up the mess and Mom shooed us away saying she was sure we had more important things to do. Come to find out, we did. I laid back on my bunk and Davy reached for something up on his. A birthday-wrapped box. He tossed it to me and sat down in the old recliner that now occupies the corner where his bed had been. The card said, “To Adam from his biggest fan – Wrink!”

The paper had baseball gloves all over it. There was a tiny, plastic ball glove tied into the bow. The box was about the size of a ball glove and smelled of ball glove oil. Surprise! Surprise! Inside there was a ball glove. It was a fielder’s mitt – just right for when I was playing shortstop. I had been borrowing whatever glove I could scrounge up. I wasn’t sure how to react so I threw the box at Davy. “I thought we’d agreed no more birthday presents between us – just things for the shelter.”

“Hey! Don’t get testy with me, pal. It was all Wrink’s doing. He insisted, and you know how hard it is to explain the plight of the homeless to a puppy dog.”

“Thanks, man! This is really great.”

“You’re welcome. Just keep throwing those fantastic games.”

“You get lots of the credit for those fantastic games as you put it.”

“Huh?”

“All the help you’ve given me and the work you’ve done with the catchers. They’re reacting more and more like you out there every day. No pitcher could ask for more than that,

unless, of course that it could be you.”

I choked up and tried to camouflage it all with a quick smile. Davy nodded, looked away, and slapped his leg for Wrink to join him. He did. Then, we talked for hours. He finally opened up about his anger over what had happened – still never blaming me. It would have been easier I think if he had. He talked about the realistic alternatives he saw for himself after high school. We talked about that day when I might leave for college and we’d be separated for the first time since he arrived there in our room as a baby (one which, after just 24 hours I offered to give back to the Dr. with a most polite, “No thank you”).

“It’s how life is,” he said.

“Yeah. It’s how life is.”

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All in all it’s been a very good first week in my life as an eighteen year old. . .

“Love you, Davy.”

“Love you, Birthday Boy, and, by the way, you may want to lie down v e r y gently on your pillow tonight.

“What? Why?”

Splat!!! A dozen water balloons burst as I pounded my fist into it to see what he meant.”

“Adam?”

“Yes, Davy.”

“April Fool!”

I ALWAYS FORGET!

SATURDAY, APRIL 8TH

And the countdown continues! 25 more days of school. I’m sure I won’t have any finals. Davy and I both have straight A’s going. A few more tests and one more book report and I’ll be home free.

Three games this past week. I started once and finished once. Just threw six innings as a starter. We were ahead 8 - zip at that point so coach gave one of the Sophomores a chance. We won 10 – 5. I went in for Kurt in the eighth and only had to face seven batters. His arm tired. It was unseasonably hot that afternoon. I must have drunk a

gallon of water myself. We won 4 to 3. Coach told Dad that this was the best team he'd fielded in twenty years. That made me feel pretty good – REAL good when I counted it up and realized this was only his 20th year coaching.

Davy always sits in a chair just above the dugout and keeps up a constant line of chatter from, "Play Ball," until the final out. Once, he got so excited he fell out of the chair. The whole little stadium became absolutely quiet with all eyes on him. I know he was terribly embarrassed but he reseated himself, waved his hat at the crowd and called out, "That's what happens when you put off taking Chair Sitting until your senior year. I understand Miss Moss will be teaching it again next semester." Everybody roared and clapped. Miss Moss is an older, very overweight, not much liked, teacher who is well known for NEVER moving out of the chair behind her desk. It got him a call to the principal's office the next day but according to Davy there was much more laughing between the two of them than there was anything resembling a chewing out. Davy had already gone to apologize to her. She took it very well.

Davy helped me wash the truck this evening after I got home from work. He says it needs a name. We didn't come up with one – well, not one we're willing to repeat in public at least. I'm more and more amazed at how Davy just tries everything as if the crutches weren't even there. He washed the windshield and did the hubcaps. He got up into the back so he could reach the roof of the cab. Sometimes it seems like he has some control over his legs and then other times it seems clear that he doesn't. Maybe it comes and goes. That doesn't seem reasonable if I remember my Anatomy class correctly. I give him lots of credit. I'm not sure I'd have had the guts to have done all the things that have been required of him. I'm not big on pain to begin with and he's sure had his share of that.

Prom is less than two weeks away. I'm looking forward to it. Grace is REALLY looking forward to it. Through it all, I've learned an interesting thing about females and proms – well any big deal party, I suppose. They willingly – I repeat, willingly – endure weeks in a tanning bed prior to the week of the prom and then on the day of the event another ten hours

getting their hair done, their finger nails done, their toe nails done and their face done all so they will look good during the three hours they spend at the prom. You'd think they'd be too exhausted to dance. I will report back on how all this actually works out.

Gotta cut this short tonight. I'm going to help with a pancake breakfast at Grace's church in the morning. I've arranged for a sub at the Vets. Begins at five a.m. I've conned Davy into coming and helping. They always seem to have lots of girls but very few guys. (Maybe bringing Davy isn't such a good idea after all.) It should be lots of fun. Never flipped flapjacks before but I bet I can learn.

"Love you, Davy."

"Love you, Pancake boy. There better be patty sausage!"

SATURDAY, APRIL 15TH

Twenty more days of school. Next Saturday is Prom, then just three weeks left – more or less. We had lots of fun at the pancake breakfast. It was held in the fire station just down the road from Grace's church. When they said to prepare for five hundred I'll admit I was skeptical. But they even surpassed that. People come from everywhere. I guess it has a great reputation – low price and all you can eat. I can't understand how I've missed that all these years. Stranger still is that Davy missed it. Lots of hot girls out there – of course I'M not looking. I have the prize of all prizes. The beauty of all beauties. The girl of all girls.

On the Raymond front I'm sad to report that the date we set up for him with girl number one didn't work out so well. Their interests turned out to be worlds apart – she was into sports and he's into computers and internet stuff. Dauntless Davy has another date set for Friday night. He says he has corrected for interests.

For all the grief I've given Ray here in these pages, he really isn't all that bad. When he gets the natural approval he is due, he has no need to make himself so outlandish in order to be noticed. Still, I pray for a girl in his life.

Baseball is going great. Played our twelfth game

yesterday and have an 11 and 1 record. Some of the toughest conference games are still ahead of us, but like Davy says, we haven't been winning because we're lucky. We've been winning because we're really good. Every game we just go out there and do our thing the best we can do it. So far that's been all that was necessary.

I know this is short tonight but the days feel like they have shrunk – just not enough time with school, ball, work, Davy, and Grace.

“Love you, Davy.”

“Love you, Adam. Ever worry about not being able to get out of that monkey suite you'll be wearing to the prom?”

SATURDAY, APRIL 22ND

Fifteen days and counting. Whoopee! Had a date with Grace tonight. It was great, of course. Dinner and a movie. Lots of kissing after the movie. I've started going out to her church for Sunday evening service. Our family seldom goes in the evening. It gives me one more day a week to see Grace. It gives me one more church service a week, too, of course.

For poor old Ray, it's two down and who knows how many to go. The two of them did share interests in computers but he's a PC guy and she was a Mac gal. Some things just don't mix, I guess. They parted friends and he does spend some time with her before school on some days. That provides a little relief.

Three more games under our belts. Two wins and one loss moves us to 13 and 2. We lead our conference by a huge margin.

The big news comes in two parts. Grace and I had a wonderful prom night. Early in the evening, before we left her house, we took lots and lots of pictures. We ate at a fancy restaurant and even knew what to do with most of the silverware. Grace had spaghetti and I ordered lasagna. The dance was really nice. They didn't play lots of slow songs but it was just so great being there together. Grace looked absolutely fantastic. There wasn't a girl there that could hold a

candle to her. And I was there with her. I got more than a few thumbs up from other guys. We stayed 'til the last dance. It was a slow one but ended too soon. Did I mention how beautiful Grace looked? I told her when I picked her up. I told her during dinner. I told her at the dance. I told her when I took her home and we lingered over a romantic kiss.

The second piece of big news is really for Davy . . .

“Love you, Davy, and yes I managed to fight my way out of the tux!”

“Love you, Adam. But are you really going to wear that red tie to bed again tonight?”

SATURDAY, APRIL 29TH

Ten more days! Ten more days! It's not that I'm eager or anything but, TEN MORE DAYS!

Third time's the Charm! Third time's the Charm! (Translation: Raymond has a girlfriend. Raymond has a girlfriend. Do that sing songy thing with it and you have the full treatment.)

She's not a student. She graduated last year and works in a computer sales and repair place. She's nice looking, has a good sense of humor, and seems to really like Ray. That's the good news. The bad news is that since she's not in school – well, that's what the second, “Ten more days,” thing was all about up above. We will soon be parting ways!!! I think both Ray and we guys have learned a good lesson. Ray became civilized and realized there are wonderful social rewards for that kind of behavior. We guys learned not to toss out Plan A so quickly next time. Only kidding, of course. I'd never really go with violence as plan A. We did learn to think such things through a bit more thoroughly before acting and have come to realize some things about the responsibilities that automatically follow one's good deeds.

Doc Baker says she can use me three days a week during the summer and that Dr. Vetter, who has a vet clinic between here and Ft Smith, says he can use me two days. Luck is shining on me all of a sudden. That whole sentence is full of baloney. It's not luck. I've worked hard to prove I'm good help for Dr. Baker and she's seen that and

recommended me to Dr. Vetter because of it. And good things don't just shine on me occasionally. My life is plumb full of good things. It would probably take another journal just to list them. So, scratch that.

We're 15 and 3. I'm six and 1 with three saves and an ERA of 1.12. Davy jokes that coach can just send the other pitchers home to their mamas. It isn't so, but I am having a great year and nobody ever really understands how cool that feels until it happens to you. One of the kids on the team bus was joking about it not long ago. He said it seemed like I was playing for both the Carter boys this year. I was glad Davy didn't hear that. I didn't respond but that has been in the back of my head. I mean, I know I can't do that. The whole concept is bogus but there is a part of me that still thinks I have to somehow make things up to Davy and doing well on the mound is one way to try I guess. I know he's happy for me. I just really hope he isn't sad for himself.

Wrink weighs over twenty pounds – every inch a Mutt. He still has his puppy cuteness but he's become strong and fast. He's always under foot and if Davy is here it's Davy's feet he's under. I'm convinced the mutt believes he's the kid's little brother. I suppose that's at least one step up from thinking he's a wheel chair. When Davy and Wrink are outside and Wrink becomes too much of a pest, Davy flings one of his crutches as far as he can and Wrink bounds off to retrieve it. It only gives Davy a couple minutes of peace but it's a riot to watch. Davy says he's going to begin lobbying to have crutch hurling added to the Olympic Games. I said if he did submit the idea, I was sure there would be some hurling but not necessarily the kind he had suggested. . .

“Love you, Davy.”

“Love you, Crusher of Olympic hopes!

MAY

SATURDAY, MAY 6TH

The countdown stands at five days and holding until Monday – the last Monday of my high school career.

Our team just keeps winning. Coach said he can see the opponent's bus shaking as it pulls up to the field. I just imagine he's right. We have five straight away games and finish up here the Friday before graduation. In one way, I'll hate to see the season end but in another I think I'm ready to put high school behind me. It's been really cool, probably one of the greatest experiences of my life, but it is my life that I need to get on with.

I told Davy I was a little scared about what was ahead for me now. He said I was a fool if I was only a little scared. He told me a story he'd read somewhere (or, just made up on the spot for my benefit – doesn't really matter which, I suppose). It was about a new Knight back in King Arthur's days who was starting out on his first journey. He confided to an older Knight that he was frightened. The older Knight said, "Don't think of it as fright. Think of it as your edge. It's there for the purpose of keeping you alert and ready to experience everything life has to offer. To see new possibilities and pursue things never before known or witnessed."

So, I'm determined to believe that gnawing in my stomach is my EDGE and I'll proudly carry it with me into life. I thanked Davy for the story – regardless of its actual source.

Like I expected I have no finals. I forgot that sophomores have to take them regardless. Davy doesn't

have any on Wednesday so we're going to go out to the fishing/ swimming hole we used to slip off to when we were kids. We weren't supposed to go there unsupervised but for some reason that made it all the more attractive. It's where we've always done some of our best talking. I hope we can go often this summer. We have one last chance to build some wonderful boyhood memories.

The 'gang' is coming over for an end of the school year bash Friday night. We'll rent a movie, eat greasy junk food till we break out, dance a bit, talk a lot and, in between those fairly predictable pop-ins by Mom and Dad, we may even get some kissing in. There are lots of parties out there that we could go to but almost all of them involve at least alcohol if not drugs. None of us have ever needed that kind of stuff to help us have a good time. It's hard for me to understand how kids get to a point when they can't just depend on their natural selves for fun – why they have to turn themselves into some unrecognizable, artificial, being that can't even remember if he really had fun the night before or not. It's terribly depressing if that's typical of my generation. At least I know it's not true of the entire group.

For the New Year's Eve party Davy put a 'No Hurling Zone' sign on the front door. It really brought home the idea that we were there to just enjoy being ourselves. I pray nobody gets badly hurt. . .

"Love you, Davy."

"Love you, Dragon Slayer. Go get 'em, bro!"

SATURDAY, MAY 13TH

"School's out! School's out! Teacher let the mules out." It's something we'd always say so gleefully when we rushed out the doors on the final days of grade school and into the almost immediate boredom of summer. My summer won't be boring. It looks like Davy's won't either. Ray's girlfriend got him a job at the store where she works if he wants it. He's waiting to assess any other offers that might come his way.

There is one great piece of news – if I'm allowed to brag here and who's to say I'm not. The baseball team members and coaches always vote one player as MVP for the

year – we have them for each game as well. So, this year there were twenty-eight of us eligible to vote. We each were supposed to write ONE name on a card and put it in a box and then the Coaches counted them up and made the announcement.

We did the voting thing and then waited for the tally to be made and the winner announced. Coach walked over to where we were all sitting together in the infield. He took off his hat and scratched his bald, but well-tanned head. Some of the guys began to giggle. I didn't understand.

"We have a situation," he began, looking at the tally sheet through his half-lens reading glasses. It seems that only one of you lunkheads knows how to follow directions. The rest of you voted for two instead of one. I smell a conspiracy. However, I've talked it over with the other coaches and we've decided to go with your wishes this year. Therefore, I proudly announce that in a unanimous decision, the team votes to split the MVP award between Adam and Davy Carter."

Actually, Davy got one more vote than I did – mine. He hadn't thought he should be voting since he hadn't played. I was so happy for Davy that when I told Mom and Dad when we got home, I just said, "Davy won MVP. Isn't that the greatest thing ever?"

Davy then set the record straight but for me it will always be Davy's trophy.

Graduation is next Saturday at seven p.m. in the high school auditorium. It will be hot and long and boring but it will be GRADUATION! At this point it can't come soon enough. I can't get my thoughts organized tonight so I guess I'll close. . .

"Love you, M."

"Love you, VP"

SATURDAY, MAY 20TH

Where can I begin this final entry about my high school career? Graduation took place earlier this evening. At our school the major awards that go to seniors are presented first, then the diplomas (all after what is usually a totally forgettable Commencement address delivered by somebody who is fully out of touch with how it is to be a young person today). I got

my diploma – fake of course. I have to go in next week and pick up the real one.

I must say I had mixed feelings when I accepted it with one hand and shook the school board president's hand with the other. All quite unexpectedly, he drew me close and whispered in my ear: "We can never thank you enough for what you've done for our Raymond." No one heard but me, and no one other than this page will ever hear it from me. I responded with something like, "He was worth every minute, Sir." I had never thought about it in exactly that way until that moment. It had, I have since concluded, been an honest response. It was an awkward moment for both of us. It was a wonderful moment for both of us.

The highlight of the evening – of the year – however, had nothing to do with receiving the diploma or the kind words from Mr. Rudolf. It had nothing to do with the fact that I knew my family and Grace's were there, proudly supporting me and my accomplishments. It had nothing to do with that magical transition between childhood and adulthood so often claimed to happen on graduation day.

It came during the bestowing of the awards. Those of us who were to receive them had been notified several days in advance. After the address was finished, we were ushered up on stage as a group and seated there. The awards were presented individually. Twelve in all. I was to receive Outstanding Athlete Scholar – some sort of combo formed by grades and jock-type performance. Don't get me wrong, I was very proud to have been chosen. It really hadn't entered my head that it would come my way. Right or not, the school holds it up to be the most important award, so, it was presented last. The Principal made the presentations. He had something very personal and very nice to say about each recipient. Eventually, after predictably, polite, applause for each of the eleven who went before me, it was my time. I was suddenly nervous, after having spent the three days since receiving the notification being all quite calm, cool, and matter of fact about it.

The principal called my name and I stepped forward, hoping I didn't trip and fall or catch my gown on something. I had the urge to check my fly but realized it couldn't be seen

regardless of its state of zippedness. He put his hand on my shoulder and turned us both toward the audience – a bit embarrassing I thought. He spoke:

“This year Adam Carter is our Outstanding Athlete Scholar.”

He droned on for a few more minutes explaining about the criteria used to make the selection. I have to admit I was impressed with myself if all that was really true.

“We have a long-standing tradition here at Waynesville High, that the father of the recipient comes forward and makes the presentation.”

If I had ever known about that, I had forgotten. Attending graduations had never been high on my social calendar. Dad stood and to a smattering of more, polite, applause made his way to the front of the auditorium, up the ramp to the stage, and stood beside me. We automatically hugged – brief but sincere. At that point the principal appeared to have become all flustered.

“This is embarrassing, Adam, but I don’t find your award here on the table.”

He looked around at the other officials there on the stage. They all shrugged, each claiming ignorance of its whereabouts, some of them even looking here and there. Then, from off the stage to my right, I heard a voice that was pretty familiar to me. It said:

“Is this possibly what you’re looking for, Sir?”

It was Davy standing there, holding the award scroll above his head. I mean he was **STANDING** there! Not a crutch in sight. Instinctively I looked around for Wrink. Then it happened. Davy took a step in my direction. Then another, and another, and another. With each step, more of the audience stood as they applauded. By the time he had walked the full thirty feet from the wings to where we were at the center of the stage, everybody was on their feet clapping and cheering. I wanted to run to him the whole time but knew I didn’t dare. This was his quest – his mission – his gift to me. Through my tears, I smiled the smile of the Ages. To heck with macho – this was my brother.

Things came together for me in a flash – why he hadn’t allowed me to take him to Easter Seal anymore. He was

working on this most special of all possible graduation gifts. Why he was saving the shoes I'd given him – he was wearing them that night for the first time. And, why sometimes I thought I had seen him move his legs – errors on his part as he tried to keep his progress secret from me.

When he stopped beside us, he offered the scroll to the principal who motioned him on to Dad. Dad put his hand on Davy's and together they handed it to me. I put my hand on top of theirs and we stood, holding a hug for the longest time.

It was my moment, doggone it, and I was going to have it my way. I motioned for Mom and she joined us. She should have been included from the start. There was more applause. In the end, Mom and Dad with Davy between them returned to seats in the audience.

* * *

Most times life is good. Sometimes it's great. On occasion, it becomes f a n t a s t i c, and tonight was one of those rare and precious times. . .

“Love you, Davy, you crutchless wonder, you.”

“Love you, Adam. I really do, you known. I couldn't have done it without you.”

“Arf! . . . Arf! . . . Arf!”

The end

Other Books for teens by John Hammond:

Lucky in Life

The Life and Loves of Adam Carter