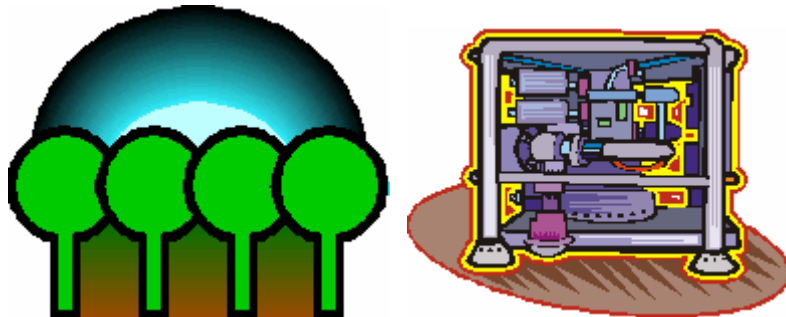


Hargrove Maintenance

By: Robert Alan Steiner. 1998.



Even as a young student in elementary school one of the things I always wanted to do was write a book. Before I had finished High School I had taken as many writing classes as I could do so someday I might write that Great American Novel, my friends thought it unnecessary but what they didn't know was how interested I was and also that it wasn't like doing chores to me. It was some years after Graduating that the idea of writing a book came back to me again and I began in 1989.

I wanted to write something meaningful to me, a story that I could read that would bring out my memories from the time of my life that it was about. I wasn't exactly sure how I would write it until I put the pen to the paper but after writing for some time I put together this fictional book that reflected upon my ideas of how a young adult life could be, I already had ideas for the many things I could write and doing it was enjoyable. It took me a long time to complete it though because I hadn't totally thought it through the first few times I had written it. I started writing this book when I was 23 and had just returned from Germany where I was stationed as a Generator Mechanic (52-Delta) in the US ARMY.

My novel Hargrove Maintenance is about a group of graduating High School guys that want to be recruited to work at their local public utilities service in the fictional small rural town of Hargrove, USA.

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1. George's Territory

He hears the sound of a faint electric guitar. It is a warm summer's evening, not a cloud in the sky. Deciding it's a good time to mow the lawn and rolls out of his hammock tied to a pine tree knocking a few leaves from his hair. Cutting the lawn is extremely tough with his push mower. It always becomes weedy and impenetrable too fast for him but he picks up the mower and starts on the lawn. His mother Stacey should be home soon.

"Dan, Dan" his mother yells. He is seventeen and in high school. At the edge of the woods, next to the lawn the guitar sound is getting louder. He looks as two of his friends come out of the woods. One boy is carrying a portable radio and the other is dancing about. The two of them are having fun. They've been roaming in the woods.

They sit on a big rock like statues. Bill has the radio, Clay is the other. Both are sweaty.

Dan continues to mow the lawn making big sweeps across the yard. Sunday evening is a good time to finish chores.

The three boys are students at Tellebooth High. School is in Weberston next to the post office and town library. There are no houses nearby, they are miles out of town. The closest home is about a mile away. Dan asks his mom to drive his friends to town in her pickup truck, she accepts.

It is a dirt road-way to the south and gravelly until it reaches the town golf course. There aren't many trees along this bumpy section of road. Mostly meadows and an occasional oak.

Grasslands to the east and the forest nearby put Stacey's home in a nice area. As the golf course comes into view the road slowly becomes paved. It's almost like Stacey's own private driveway until the golf club and paved after passing the golf course for the few miles before reaching Weberston. The woods appear to get thicker and denser mostly to the west and far away factory towers are slightly visible in Hargrove the neighboring town. Large pines, oaks and brush are in the sunny areas, swamps, willow trees and vines are in the shady areas. Judging by the thickness of brush it looks like two or three decades of growth. The forest is owned by an old farmer, along the road he keeps it neat. The first house near town is where Clay lives. Bill lives in town. It's a ten minute drive from Dan's house to Bill's. His friends were confident they could get a ride back to town.

After they return home Dan watches a show on television and then retires to bed.

Monday is a school day and a workday too. Tellebooth High's doors are open wide ready to receive the young men and women.

The school is old but nice and acquired its name from Sir Tellebooth, the leader of the association to put the school in the town of Weberston. The school has cement floors and double high ceilings with lockers inside the hallways. Most of the hallways have glass windowed doors for looking into the class rooms. The school amphitheatre is

rock and lawn, a good place to relax or study on a warm afternoon. Most of the buildings are old except the science department and general multipurpose room. Medium in size equipped with a good athletics department there are four hundred students. The school has a spacious quality.

Stacey drops Dan on the drive to work. Clay and Bill meet him at the front steps than into class they go.

Bill's home is located near Tellebooth High. His fence divides the school yard from his back yard. It's quiet behind the school because the neighborhood is upper-middle class.

First period English begins at eight o'clock. The class is run by a young teacher named Riley. Dan, Clay and Bill have this class together. The topic of the day is not unlike any other day. He gives instructions on building individual sentences and fabricating paragraphs then makes a few jokes before releasing the class to period two. For Dan, Clay and Bill second period is their study period. In the student center they talk about class notes and purchase snacks. Dan meets up with Clay and Bill again third period for science. Students file into their seats as the teacher opens the door at five minutes until ten o'clock. The lecture starts with a nasal, "Good morning class." Dan and Bill laugh at each other silently. The teacher has a reputation for being monotonous and he lectures often. It seems he would replace a lab day with a lecture if he had a choice. Class today is too fast and hard to follow.

At lunch time after the guys eat they go to the library. Many students are comparing notes and reading, the usual scene for a school day. Dan, Bill and Clay sit in a section for study away from the quiet area. There they talk with other classmates about all sorts of school things. When the bell signals the end of lunch the noise level raises and the halls become packed. Before the second bell everyone is lined up, class is beginning.

Their social studies teacher Pat persistently directs the study often unyielding to questions. Going on a field trip is usually out of the picture too. Clay has heavy eyes fifteen minutes after class starts. Bill sits beside him and tries to keep him awake. Dan watches this behavior with utter disbelief. His disbelief isn't from Clay's sleepy eyes. His disbelief is about Clay's ability to perform with other classmates. Dan thinks Clay sleeps with one eye opened. He's a cool cat. A lot of students become sleepy after the lunch hour.

After social studies is math class. At the front of the class is the teacher's desk. The chairs are organized loosely. Students are not cramped during study. Humming of the air conditioner creates quiet background noise. The class starts with examination of yesterday's homework. The correct answers are called for review of mistakes then it's passed to the front of the class and tomorrows homework is assigned.

Three o'clock school's out and just after they go to the "Small Change Cafe" restaurant for a sandwich and soda. It's a couple blocks from Tellebooth High to the cafe. Dan's mom is the head waitress. Stacey is sitting on a bar stool

dressed in her uniform and trying to work a change machine, the shop isn't busy this time of day. Sitting at their usual table next to the front window with a view down the street they order sandwiches plus a pitcher of soda with three cups. Dan takes their orders to the cook. The boys think it's super having a friend like Dan because they receive fast service.

Looking through the window part of school yard is visible and they can see people in the art shop "Art Stop" across the street. They exit the cafe leaving plates littered with bread crusts and bits of sandwich remains behind.

After walking around a car parked at the curb the boys look through the front window. Sculptures and handmade pottery hide their faces as they gaze. Inside the shop earrings, bracelets, leather goods and necklaces are nicely displayed. A lady named Marcie owns the shop. She has a "life doesn't stop" attitude that visitors find nice. Standing behind a plant she watches the boys try to introduce themselves to another student. Jody is the first to investigate her.

Liz is her name, short for Elizabeth. They initiate conversation almost immediately. Dan finds that her residence is near his and she is a sophomore. She thinks it's good to make friends from school so they make plans to meet tomorrow. Marcie observes them carefully, she is always interested in possible customers.

Dan's mother is returning home, it's time for him to get a ride. He offers Liz a ride too. Thinking a few minutes she decides to take his offer. They jump into her pickup truck. She lives on the same street as them, he and his mom are amazed they haven't met her already. Clay and Bill start walking.

Her stop is almost a quarter mile east of a lone old Oak tree past the golf course. Stacey says since the time she first moved to Weberston she wondered if anyone friendly lived there. It's only a few minutes walk for Liz from there.

At their home the table is already set for supper. They wait for a friend named George. He is an insurance agent from town. Stacey and he have been accompanying each other for months. It's impolite to eat before a guest arrives, they wait.

On the road a car with headlights on is visible from where they sit, it's George's car. A station-wagon with fog lights. Knock. Knock. Knock. George is at the door. Dan opens the door looking famished. Everyone sits and begins to eat after they get to the table. George likes the meal Stacey has fixed. Dan eats so fast that he hardly even tastes the food then goes to watch television. He wants to let George and his mom have some private time for themselves. Clean up's later.

In the morning Stacey and Dan get up early to make it to the cafe and assemble with George and the breakfast crowd. It is a widely known social junction by the local residents. When she arrives the first thing she does is

check the tip can. An aroma of pine scent is in the air. Pine scent mixed with the smell of breakfast cooking is great.

George orders a big omelet. He says their omelets fit a man's style. Stacey is five feet four and one hundred twenty pounds. She has brown hair and blue eyes.

Dan is a large sized teenager. He stands five feet ten and is one hundred and sixty-five pounds. He's wearing Levi's with patches on them, and a short sleeved shirt. He has brown hair and blue eyes too. He's been a student at Tellebooth High since he was a freshman.

George, Stacey and Dan wait at a booth near the front window overlooking the parking lot. Their orders should arrive in ten minutes. Clay and Bill have strolled in. Clay is Dan's friend. He and Bill order bacon and eggs.

Clay is dressed in athletic clothing. He's sixteen years old and is medium-sized.

Bill is average sized too, five feet ten and is dressed casually.

They sit and converse for a while until the orders arrive. Stacey had ordered orange juice with a hash brown a la carte. It arrives with George's plate. His omelet looks good with spicy hot salsa. Dan's order of French fries and a soda arrive with Clay's over easy eggs. Bill's bacon and eggs are completed too. The food looks tasty and is gobbled up almost as fast it arrives to the table.

Before it's time to go to class, they talk about the happenings of the day, George departs to his office.

Lunch time after their morning classes Liz and the boys arrive as planned at the student center. Dan had asked her to sit with Clay, Bill and himself. They get into an interesting conversation about other people at school.

Lunch is served for one dollar and seventy-five cents in the school's cafeteria. It is chili dogs with relish, salad and chocolate milk day. They don't mind buying lunch at school instead of packing a lunch.

Often students use the recreation center, it's open weekends too. It's near the school's gymnasium. The recreation center is like an athletic student center. Inside it has a recreation room with paintings and pictures of the school's historical sport events on the walls and a fine display of trophies in a cabinet. To make meetings easier the recreation center has a small office and kitchen for guests. On cold mornings the fireplace on the side of the building facing the pool is kept burning to warm the place. The gym is large containing two basketball courts and bleachers. Adjacent to the gym is the weight room. They have been training in the weight room almost the entire year. It contains one weight machine, bench press and free weights.

The swimming pool is twenty-five by fifteen meters. The water is ten feet deep and sparkling blue. Clay and Dan usually just sunbathe. Every summer day students are swimming in the pool and sunbathing.

The football field is just outside the gym. It has an oval running track around it.

There are four tennis courts, they are hard surface.

Scheduled classes and events include regular physical education class, seasonal sports and various clubs. They're well maintained facilities.

Ten minutes until one o'clock it's fourth period and social studies. Today the class is studying the migration of people to California.

Most of the migrants settled down near highway forty-nine west of the Sierra range to work on the railroad or mine the teacher explains.

After social studies is math class, students are to be in their chairs before two o'clock. This is a special math class that covers topics from basic math to algebra for students who need refreshing their skills. Students from ninth to twelfth grade are attending. Everyone works at their own pace and skill level. After instructions are given the class takes a short test and get dismissed upon it's completion. This class is low stress but takes effort.

Every hallway in the school is packed with students going to their lockers. Dan removes books from his locker then starts walking to the cafe. He studies and waits for a ride home.

At the cafe strangers travel in and out all day. Business men, athletes, old people, young people and an occasional hitch hiker plant themselves outside for thirty minutes or an hour. Dan likes to watch people and sometimes he helps his friends with homework while there.

He usually studies having plenty of time before his ride home. Soon after his mom's shift is done they jump into the pickup and begin on their way past the golf club and down the bumpy dirt road. She asks him about his homework and derives it will take him some time to finish. He has homework from the previous days partially completed, his class notes were rough.

Stacey's friend George is on his way to her house. He lives in town near the highway. He has just sold an insurance policy to the Hargrove Utilities Service. George was made honorary superintendent of personnel departments insurance policies with help from his friend Erick who owns a lot of stock in the company.

George's friend Erick looks good, wears a suit, tie and sport shoes. George met him in the barber shop one day a couple of years ago. They both wanted to look at the same magazine and almost ripped it in half becoming embarrassed with each other. They had met casually around town before.

George arrives at Stacey's full of energy and vigor. He is excited about the fact that he is on a winning streak. She is interested and asks him what he wants to do with his money. George has been thinking about buying a new home. Stacey has little experience with real estate. She recommends he finds an agent.

George asks Stacey for the phone book to look for a reputable person.

Downtown Weberston, pronounced like Webberston, is where most local business takes place. George jumps into his car and arrives there to look for the agent's office. He walks the street from where he parked and finds the business

office. George enters into a relaxing lobby with a television and a couple chairs. In the corner there is a secretary behind a desk typing what looks like a mailing list. She asks George if he would like any help. "Yes," George replies. They usually don't keep clients waiting too long. "I need to inquire about purchasing a piece of real estate," he says. "Sam will help you shortly," says the secretary, "In fact, a few properties are being looked at presently." They talk for the remainder of the day, only a few minutes, and before five the office is already closed and locked.

Stacey is a real homemaker and meets George at the front door wearing perfume and dressed great. The home is immaculate. Stacey insists George sit and relax. He thinks sitting on the furniture might disturb it. Everything is color coordinated and the home looks excellent inside as well as out.

Stacey's house is a Victorian with divided windows. The roof is shingled. The exterior is gloss white with painted green shutters. It has four bedrooms, three restrooms, kitchen, family room and TV room. Every bedroom has fairly hot color pastel flower wall paper. Inside the home are new carpets on the floor and paintings on the walls. There is a two car garage on the east side of the home. Flowery shrubs are growing on both sides of the walkway to the front door and along the sides of the driveway. It's high class and squared away not slovenly or low class. Her pickup is in good shape too. The interior looks as good as the exterior and its windows are clean. Inside the garage everything is put on a shelf or into a box. She even keeps the spare side of the garage clean for visitors. George finds Stacey thoughtful and considerate. They nicely kiss each other.

At midnight everyone is asleep, the lights are low, and the only sounds heard are a nightingale tweeting and crickets. Dan has fallen asleep with his headphones on.

Stacey is the first to be up and cooking in the morning. Dan and George arise but she has already eaten breakfast and prepared oatmeal, half a grapefruit and orange juice for them.

Barking at the window is the cat chaser, named Nubby because of his docked tail, his dirty paws tap on the window and leave dirt on everything just to get a bowl of food.

After everyone has eaten they straighten their beds and make the house neat, their days always start square, cleanup is a ritual.

Dan gets a ride with his mom to school and is dropped near the steps before she travels to the cafe. He will be in class with his friends Bill and Clay performing a science experiment today. Laboratory study day is Thursday. The lessons are interesting to them. Although Dan, Bill and Clay think lab study is fun the teacher doesn't give them much.

George drives to Sam's office after checking his mail box. He has the list of lots on his desk. Sam and George decide to examine the suburbs nearby to see if any of the lots could be prospective to him.

One area is ten miles from Weberston on highway eight. They drive there and pull off the highway near the river and down a gravel road. The posterior of the gravel road has a cul-de-sac where unimproved new homes are. They pull his car to the side of the road and park facing the direction they came then get out of the car to take a look about. The area contains wildwood, birch, pines, oak trees with shrubs, but near one lot are bunches of flowers and plants too. George photographs the area although it would be too far from his territory.

Another on the list is close to highway eight, three miles from town and east of the highway. Arriving, they find that it's covered with pine trees and dense brush. It doesn't look too unusable, but it's flat, bulldozing is possible. George reloads his camera then they decide to inspect an area closer to Bloomview.

During the lunch hour the students eat in the cafe at their usual front window booth. Liz walks in the front door and notices Dan. She walks to the boys table and tells them about her day at school. They act as if she is boring. She feels out-spoken for the moment but exits with the guys anyways. The four of them walk slowly down the street. Dan shares some breath mints with everyone while returning to class.

From Weberston, George and Sam travel east along Weberston street and north following Bryant street. Lot three is eight miles down Bryant street on the left. George likes the third suburb best. It is all meadows. Sam also, with a quick decision, likes it best too. It is all meadow. George photographs that scenery too.

They decide to discuss more deals later. He agrees with the man in the gray suit, pictures and time help any decision maker. Work is not completed yet.

In social studies they are learning about the mechanization of America. Most of the boys learn quickly.

The first machine used in America was the automatic cotton picker. Farming was revolutionized by the cotton picking machine. A lot of cotton pickers lost their jobs as a result. The people who got forced out either found employment or had to do a lot of thinking.

The day comes to a seemingly quick end. The boys have about an hour of homework this evening. Bill and Clay often study at Dan's.

Stacey is the best cook George knows. Clay, Bill and Liz have been invited too. Around the table in the dining room, they wait to be served. Supper is already prepared. Immediately as Stacey comes with a plate of food, it is devoured. She returns to the kitchen again to choose another tray of food. This tray disappears fast also. She takes her seat, deciding to let the others serve themselves.

After eating, a conversation about the food begins. Stacey's cooking is full-bodied, she uses many vegetables and spices, she believes in good nutrition. George was eating slowly, and the last to finish. It is gratifying how many friends have shown. Stacey is happy to be able to accommodate them.

She likes to prepare fancy dinners. They guys can handle good food anytime and make an effort at cleaning the dining room and kitchen.

Saturday's menu is being catered for the Small Change Cafe. A group of neighbors from nearby Weberston decided it would be a nice idea to cater food to people out and about taking care of business.

An old milk truck is being used as a catering vehicle. A cash box, stove and counter have been added to it and there's a schedule of planned appearances for any volunteers. Festivities are exciting when they are carefully planned. Stacey became interested in the project and to make sure everything works easily the cafe will be the usual organizing and cleaning place.

Saturday is the favorite day of the week because usually everyone gets together. George phoned Stacey. He is on the way. Stacey planned to get everyone together at the cafe so she could try the catering food and so everyone will have a great time today.

Years ago there had been another cafe occupying the same location on Main street that is visible from the highway. It burned down. A large part of the town contained buildings that were made to different codes and unsymmetrical. Everything was conscientiously rebuilt afterwards since the towns population had increased greatly. After the cafe was rebuilt business increased not only because the town helped but because the owner added a dining room to the south where before there was a doll shop. It lay in ashes for almost a year. Their idea was short in coming to redesign the cafe with restaurant style to attract business from the neighboring towns but it worked.

The cafe is in a nice location down town. Across the street are many shops and a supermarket. It's an ideal place for the catering business. Even though they haven't made permanent plans they chose the cafe location and are constantly using the supermarket that will supply them with delicatessen materials. Most people that live in Weberston use the newly remodeled store and it's presently the largest in town.

The rebuilding of Weberston immediately brought on sight-seers and crowds of people interested in purchasing land. Many residents who had lived there for the privacy were upset because of traffic downtown and cars wandering through "their" country-side. Then the farmer owned a lot more land.

George sits in the back yard with the boys. Dan says. "I hope mom got the catering truck stocked up because I'm starved," sounding a little sarcastic. The others laugh.

They arrive and a bunch of the regulars greet them. Everyone that spends time at the cafe saw the catering menu Stacey put up at the shop. The catering truck is loaded with sliced meats, crackers, drinks, desserts, different types of bread, hors d'oeuvres and of coarse coffees as part of the menu. Many trays and plates are covered with assorted sandwich bread and meat, cheese and crackers. They hop aboard to inspect the assortment of food.

The catered lunch was agreeable to everyone and met Stacey's expectations. It's was great deal and she is pleased. They talk while the staff cleans up. It is the first time the vehicle was used for a party and thanks to her it went according to plan. Liz is missed the party, she had a special study group. Bigger and better arrangements later.

Sunday in the morning Stacey and Dan get up to have breakfast before traveling to church. I've seen a quick breakfast but hers takes the doughnut. A bowl of hot cereal and an apple or orange is all she needs to get up and go.

Church is in Bloomview about twenty-five minutes from their residence. The town is totally residential, without businesses except for the church. Stacey likes the ride in her truck because of the beautiful country. They arrive in half an hour.

The morning mass has many others from the community there. Nearly half way through the service the communion bread bits are passed around the chapel as part of the ceremony. There's plenty for everyone but Dan doesn't want any he only likes listening to the chants as they echo throughout the chapel. Stacey likes the bread bits and takes a whole pocket full to snack on. She thinks it's all right because nobody noticed. They return home after finishing the service.

Stacey and Dan picked this church because they liked the style. The organ in the church is an old type with bellows. It isn't electronic. They've kept it in good shape. Each stained glass window is made of hundreds of individual stained glass pieces. Stained glass windows and bellowed organ make the church appear old fashioned. It even has old mahogany benches and statues too. Church is fun for all involved. Sunday school starts after morning mass. Dan is too old for Sunday school.

Sunday brunch at the cafe is usually the place to be around noon. They have tea and snacks to chose from. That's the time most of the customers are together there. Along with the tasting assorted breakfast dishes are served until two thirty in the afternoon. Dan and Stacey arrive already knowing what they are going to order.

They call the waitress to their table to place orders. Sunday Susan works because Stacey has seniority. Stacey is older than her. They work alternate shifts rarely together but have talked occasionally. She is a conscientious waitress and does her job well.

It's busy and their orders take fifteen minutes to arrive. Stacey and Dan could hardly wait. Dan skimped on breakfast and she only had a couple bread bits at church. Even though the day is half gone they'll have plenty of time to finish homework.

From home Dan calls Clay. Clay says he'll be around soon with Bill and some others. Stacey has the largest home and yard available to the boys. During summer his friends are often there. It hasn't bothered her. They have wanted to meet all day.

Clay, Bill, Bob, Mike and Jody, arrive with their homework to study and their books. Clay introduces his friend Bob to Dan. Bob is a football player for Tellebooth High. Dan isn't in classes with everyone and Bob doesn't hang out much around school. Mike is a computer nerd. He is sixteen in tenth grade. Jody is on the track team. He is the same age as Mike too. Dan shakes hands quickly with all his friends from school. They say, "how's it going today" to him, almost rhythmically.

Dan decides a game of basketball would be a good way for them to get acquainted. In the back yard a hoop is on a pole standing behind the garage. Dan finds his sports equipment inside the garage and gets his basketball. They form into two groups on the pavement surface under the hoop. After practicing an easy game, although it isn't strenuous, sweat appears on their faces soon after the first points are made. They keep playing until refreshments are needed. The game continues after a round of cold sodas that never tasted better. Dan scores the winning point.

The afternoon went exactly according to Dan's plan. His friends aren't as uneasy with each other now. They rest and freshen up with water and wet towels under a tree before entering the house from the back porch.

Effort is needed to get motivated for homework after their exciting game. Soon after sitting at the dining room table they open their school books beginning to study. Jody and Bill always find English somewhat tough. Bob thinks English looks easier than it is. Mike, Clay and Dan disagree. Science is even more complicated study from a text book. They all appear interested except for Dan. He is probably thinking about Liz. After studying for about an hour they begin their social studies assignment. Clay is the expert in social studies. He is the only student who knows anything about this class. They have good study habits. It takes them thirty minutes to complete what's left of math homework. Including the breaks their entire study session took a few hours. No need to study more, they will give have plenty of time to finish Monday.

Sunday afternoons are active in Weberston and Stacey invites the guys to town with herself and George to shop. Arriving they see people around the cafe and walking the sidewalks near down town.

Upon entering the supermarket, Clay points out the barrel in front of the store. A small bright looking prize booklet was circulating. Whomever saw it was encouraged to make a monetary wager upon winning the grand prizes. They had seen the booklet but never noticed the stand in the store before.

The prizes were numbered and there were many smaller wins available. It was a sort of fundraiser and of course every nearby town had a barrel too. Someone who had purchased a ticket would have an employee get a small deal with either a prize number or a grand prize ring from the barrel. The grand prize could be money, travel free, etc., the only condition being after the winnings were collected the ring would be returned. Everyone who entered did so for the opportunity to see themselves with the grand prize ring

and only prominent win possible, many got only numbers. Bill butts, "Maybe we'll win the prize," humorously.

After shopping they walk the street, Stacey and George sit on a bench and unexpectedly begin talking. The guys are told they'll be met near the cafe and arcade.

Locals, students and cafe goers are nearby when the students arrive. They walk into the arcade after talking but shortly George and Stacey arrive.

When Stacey tells Dan their plans he is surprised, they have decided upon becoming engaged. Immediately after his friends find out they figure the ring prize must have got them thinking. Dan doesn't take them seriously, his friends decide they're only trying to set a dating "mood." George and Stacey appear close to each other as if more than just business friends, they always have been. The guys overlook what they've heard, it may only be a prank.

2. The recruits

That evening, Nubby is at the door ecstatic to see them when they return but immediately George and Stacey take off in his car. Stacey always has energy for everyone but after the last couple of days she'd like to get some rest at George's.

Liz tries to call Dan a but he doesn't answer the phone. She decides to call a friend from school instead. She has only one good friend at school. Her name is Joan. Sometimes they study together in the library. Asking about homework is a good way to make conversation so Liz asks about Mondays assignments. Joan gives Liz the answers to make it easier on her. At least she will have something on paper when she returns to class after the holiday. They have a couple classes together. She understands the instructions from her other classes. Joan says it's alright for Liz to call anytime she wants.

It is becoming late, Dan and his friends have planned a sleepover. In the family room the television is ranging. From outside Dan can hear their loud joking and talking in the kitchen as he looks for the dog. Yelling a few times into the woods he waits then he lures Nubby into the family room with a bowl of food, slowly he comes. With snacks from the kitchen his friends enter the living room to greet their four legged pal. Dan notices Bob isn't with them. He looks in the kitchen but Bob isn't there either. Dan goes to his room upstairs. Bob is sitting on his bed looking at one of his models. Nubby wanders in soon after. Bob greets him with a pat on the back. Nubby stands there as if waiting for instructions on what to do next, looking at Bob. Loud laughter makes its way up the staircase from downstairs then he turns his head and looks toward the hallway. Dan motions him downstairs as he exits his room. He's already sitting on a pillow before Dan gets to the family room. He asks for help moving the furniture so there will be more room for sleeping bags on the floor. They listen to music and talk.

Stacey and George are at his home in Weberston. Even though it's getting late in the evening the temperature outside is quite warm. He has the air conditioner going and fans around the house. They are watching television and drinking chocolate milkshakes. George has a fan directed at the place they are sitting and it feels good to Stacey who has been complaining about the heat all day. George's house had been cleaned perfectly by his maid service earlier today. That and the air conditioner made it more comfortable for them.

Later that evening someone calls on George's telephone. It wakes the both of them up. He talks in a distinct manner on the phone to the caller. Stacey says "I hope that isn't one of the boys." He just ignores her. Because she can't fall asleep and he is preoccupied she goes outside to look around. A few minutes after she had turned on the flood light that lights up the deck and shines in the garden behind his house he comes to the patio door. "Couldn't sleep," she says. "Don't mind me," he smiles, "it was only someone who dialed a wrong number, I don't think there'll be

any more calls tonight." He turns the light out and leads her into the living room.

In the living room George starts talking about how wonderful it is to have peace and quiet at night. Stacey agrees it's fortunate and the difference between day and night is purposeful yet "exquisitely planned" in George's opinion. Stacey thought that most of her life she had slept well but George's expression of it made her feel cared for. He was always great at making her feel warm inside, probably one reason they were happy in their relationship. Rarely did either of them receive calls that were at an unheard of hour, only twice a year at the most. Even those weren't later than ten pm but George also said he never has once woken during his sleeping hours. Being with him made Stacey feel more thankful for her peace of mind. Often days were hectic and unrelenting and sleep was a thing they planned for royally.

Tuesday morning Stacey's alarm clock goes ring, ring, ring before she pushes the snooze button. Everyone is woken up at seven o'clock, even Nubby. About five minutes after the alarm buzzed she jumps from bed and begins preparing meals for Dan, herself and Nubby. She puts the dogs food in its bowl first and then puts his cereal on the table. After breakfast they wash up and are ready to start the day. The truck is parked in the garage where Dan left it yesterday. She put Nubby's food outside.

Getting back to work after a holiday is unfavorable but the start of a big week needs to be early. Stacey drives almost completely to the golf course before Dan spots Liz standing next to the old oak tree with her thumb out. They stop to pick her up from the side of the road. Continuing towards Weberston Liz and Stacey talk pleasantly about their clothing and hair styles. At the local parking lot in town Dan and Liz depart to Tellebooth High, Stacey goes to work.

Dan arrives at English class five minutes early his class is having a discussion about the assigned book and a short quiz too. He wants to get good notes. Stacey arrives at the cafe early to prepare for her shift.

Dan's classmates occasionally don't make it to class after holidays, this makes for an interesting day. Dan is a good student and always makes it to school.

Bob and Liz don't show today so Dan tries to get good notes to give them. He can't help Liz, she doesn't have any classes with him.

The boys that make it try entering class late through the back entrance. It may save their reputations if the teacher doesn't see them. He is aware of their entering late but shows no interest. Feeling lucky they open their study material quickly. Tired would describe the boys awareness but they manage to get notes and make it through the day. Dan takes a nap upon returning home, leaving his homework for later.

At Sam's office this morning they're planning finances. George likes the Bloomview lot because it's adjacent to new development, near to where he works and will make commuting easy. Examining Erick's list of financing Sam says he could

take a loan on his present home to acquire the property. He explains all sorts of techniques for purchasing property. Sam suggests to George they have a brunch meeting at the cafe for a discussion.

They walk down the street to the restaurant, sit at a table and order coffees. Their discussion concerns mostly rough proposals. It's a casual meeting without notes or paperwork.

The lunch crowd begins to arrive. It's a busy day for Stacey. She almost has forty dollars from the tips. George and Sam have "banker's hours." Everyone is talking, the catering people have just arrived. The vehicle has been parked outside in its designated area since morning. They've completed their preparation of the food and it's drawing a crowd. Sam and George listen over their conversation, they sound excited. House parties, that is their specialty. It's tough to get agreements from businesses but they're doing fine. Stacey explains to them about all the people. They've been at the cafe before but have never seen the food prep truck. "they only clean and inspect it here," she says. To them the talk sounds extravagant as if they've been doing celebrity parties. They're planning the next agenda also. Many people are attending compared to the normal lunch regulars. It's good they hadn't planned upon a discussion with timely thinking about proposals. The level of noise would have to be lower for sure, but the crowd and the attenders keep fairly organized. Stacey wanted to talk too but she is on the kitchen side of the cafe. He reminds her he will be picking up the boys on his way to her home after they're excused from school.

The guys sit waiting on the front steps at school. George arrives quickly and there are many cars in the parking lot. They come walking up to him while he talks to an acquaintance. Stacey needed extra time for work. George often takes the position of steering wheel clutcher.

Dan and his friends are frequently together after school.

At home Stacey is watching the six o'clock news and resting her feet when the phone rings, answering it's George. They begin talking about his experiences with the real estate business. George illustrates the conversation to make his relations simpler to Stacey. "Sam is a goal-oriented financial aide. His business is hired to prepare and update loans, insurance, taxes, etc. to preserve the client's personal value. They do paperwork to square away private estates." She is surprised to find he has gotten father than expected in his venture and is interested in his dealings with Sam. It's neat to hear about people in town especially from George. He thanks her for helping him with the idea to find an agent instead of going directly to the bank.

She really respects George because for a time it appeared he had few financial inspirations but with all his present plans she's impressed. After they wish each other good evening, she hangs up the phone and yells at the dog

that's been making noise in the kitchen before focusing on the news again.

Thursday everyone makes it to class but Riley thinks this bunch will never graduate because the boys are passing secret notes around his class. Their behavior is terrible today. Science class, Social studies and math, more of the same.

At three thirty George was supposed to meet Sam at his office. Even though they didn't plan upon it, they crossed paths a few times today. They passed at the cafe, post office, and a back street. It appears to George like he is doing the town and likewise too.

George finally catches up with Sam in front of his office on the sidewalk. Both of them are supposed to meet Erick at the Weberston Community Bank. Because of the utility service stocks he owns Erick has influence there.

They walk to the bank to meet Erick there. Immediately as they arrive a bank executive greets Erick and them. To expedite the purchase of the property near Bloomview they are seated at a desk in a meeting room to initiate the paperwork.

Erick needs to hire a few beginning employees, they discuss the matter as they exit the bank. George has ideas about whom to recruit. Erick prepares a quick list. Sam asks him if there's anything he can do. Erick says, "No, thanks," quietly. He already did his share for George.

Like happy business men they drive away to eat dinner at a restaurant that has great food and salads then return home for a quiet night after dining. Business as usual tomorrow.

Friday is a perfect day to have the bank people inspect George's property. It's hot and dry like the days preceding. They are making an estimate. "It's called an appraisal," says George to Erick, "don't be dumb" and "You've been doing too many of those maintenance jobs." Erick says in reply, "You Jest."

From the Weberston Credit Union come three men, appraisers. George escorts them to his home. They check the house. Structurally it's fine. The appraisers give the property a good rating then depart.

Leaning on the house, Sam tells George after selling the Weberston property he'll have enough for a down payment on the Bloomview property. Working at the Hargrove Utilities Service will make it possible to get a loan to help build the new home. He has many great ideas. George's new home plans are going to happen soon.

Erick tells George after purchasing the new property he can save the commissions from the Hargrove Utilities Service by purchasing stocks in the company.

Sam has been listening to the conversation. He's glad George came to him for help. He makes commissions of his own. They are both excited.

George returns to the bank to check on the loan again. He's impatient to purchase his new property. He, Sam and Erick go to the Small Change Cafe to find Stacey and celebrate.

Afterwards, Erick leaves the group and Sam takes George to the office to call for an architect who can do work in Bloomview. He looks around his office and finds a phone book and opens it to "A" for architect then leaves it on the table. It's closing time, they exit the office without delay.

Saturday, Sam reopens his office after lunch and the phone book is still on the table opened to "A." He puts his finger on the page and picks one.

Erick, looking for George there, taps on the door and then asks George if he found anymore people capable of working for the Utilities Service. He saw him with the local teenagers earlier. George did make a list that includes those that are good students at Tellebooth High. They add it to the list Erick prepared earlier.

Sam calls the number while George talks to Erick. After dialing the architect a Keith answers talking loudly. Sam asks him if he could exhibit any of his work in Bloomview. A few hours later he shows up at Sam's office door with pictures and models. George, Sam and he begin talking about plans for the new home. George says he likes slanted roofs with high ceilings. Sam sits and looks at the assortment of pictures. Keith talks about the designs loudly and confidently. Erick leaves with the list trying not to disturb the group much. George looks at replicas of homes until Keith gets a good idea of his interests. He looks at one of the home models on the table carefully. It's a two story home with the family room and kitchen on the ground floor and bedrooms upstairs.

George has a choice of outside details. Redwood, shingles, or pine can be exterior and even shutters or other details. Keith found a way to fabricate models so they're transportable as a two dimensional object. Many of his models even have a street and lights. Most of the homes are slanted roof types with wooden exteriors usually containing three or four rooms and two bathrooms. They are one and two level homes that can be arranged any way George wants. Folding up his models he puts them in the brief case so it will be convenient to transport them saying many are already completed where you are looking. They will meet again soon.

At Stacey's home in the country a solitary mocking bird is perched atop a power pole singing. It wakes George up a couple times but he goes to sleep again. It doesn't bother her and keeps singing until the sun comes up. He jumps up, flutters his wings, then lands about ten times a minute and stands in plain view maybe marking his territory or calling a mate. A large frog goes croak, croak, croak. He can be heard for a mile around. George thinks it's nice being far from town at Stacey's.

In the morning, Stacey, George and Dan are having breakfast on the back porch. Erick calls on the phone for Dan. He asks Dan if he would like an interview with the Hargrove Utilities Service. He thinks it's a great idea and sets up an appointment for four o'clock tomorrow.

School starts in the usual manner, the raising of the flag and students reporting to class. In English they turn

in reports that were assigned before class Wednesday. Most assignments are given with a week to complete.

Second period is Dan's free period for independent study, he goes to the student center.

During his next class, Mike wants to talk but knows talking will only disrupt the class and they won't complete the assignment. It takes the teacher all period to get one science exercise completed.

After fourth period, it's lunch time. Dan and his buddies Clay, Bill, Bob, Mike and Jody go down the street to the arcade. Erick and George arrive at the cafe. Stacey occasionally makes lunch for the boys.

After being at the arcade for a few minutes, Dan finds Joan while standing next to the door. She is walking along the street. Many students spend time at the arcade. She knows the people who are usually there but implies studying is best during the day but thinks the games look exciting. Jody and Mike after finishing their games walk towards Dan and Joan. Joan begins talking with Jody and makes him feel like they have much in common. Mike asks her why she is on the this side of town from campus. She usually walks on the other side of town. "It's interesting to see who you can find," she says to Mike. Dan says, "That could make you feel better," to Mike who is only active in front of video games most of the day. "Dan, Liz is on her way," states Mike. Joan smiles because Liz may show. "I haven't spoken with her for days." It's nice to see them at the arcade, "We usually only talk in class," she says. That's often for students even if it's only once a week. "The arcade is great, I'm learning Liz likes to get in with the town's people," she says. They talk a bit but lunch isn't long and Liz doesn't arrive so she says "score high?" then begins walking towards school.

Dan's friends are surprised when George greets them there. He pulls the boys aside to meet his friend Erick and show the guys the list with their names upon it. The list of eligible students for hire by the Hargrove Utilities Service. Erick says he would like to have them take a look at what they're offering in full and part time employment and that Dan is expected after school at his office.

Utilities maintenance is the work of employees for Erick. They will begin with low hourly wages but at least it's work. They think it might be real interesting but aren't sure if there will be any time for homework. Mostly, they don't like the deal but that's how it is. He wants them to meet at his office for applications with Dan before their final decision.

Walking along the street toward Tellebooth High back to an exciting social studies class they talk about their meeting during lunch. Explaining the importance of social studies in class the teacher overhears them talking and employs their happenings at lunch as an example of socialization. She likes the idea of the boys being resourceful.

Math class goes as usual and the day passes quickly. Dan's mom meets him and the other boys in front of the school.

The start of summer is upon the town. The boys get in Dan's mom's pickup for a ride to the Hargrove Utilities Service for job applications and a talk with Erick.

The road goes bumping to the highway near the Small Change Cafe. They roll onto highway eight and slowly reach fifty miles per hour, listening to a pop single playing on the old amplitude modulated type radio. It's probably the trucks original radio. The boys drum to the beat of the song along the way to Hargrove. They left Weberston at three thirty in the afternoon and arrive in Hargrove a few minutes later.

Hargrove is a town with only seven paved streets. They travel through town, down a couple streets and along a dirt road which makes a right then ends.

Far from the residential side of town near the river a cement building houses the utility service. On the front in bronze letters is spelled out:

"Hargrove and Vicinity Maintenance Service
Established Nineteen thirty one"

The building is surrounded by a large yard and parking. Around the maintenance area are storage tanks and breather towers for propane utility purposes.

They jump from the back of the truck and approach the building near the office door. Erick walks out and shakes hands with the boys and slowly walks toward Stacey. It's about four o'clock, the majority of employees have already gone for the day.

Dan's mom informally shakes hands with Erick. Appearing business like is appropriate. She looks around the large gravel maintenance yard and finds a shady place to park where she can see the river during their meeting.

Upon entering Erick sits with the guys in a room next to the office at a lunch table. In the meeting he hands them copies of applications and job descriptions.

Exiting the building they can't find the truck, but after a whistle from Stacey they spot it parked next to a blue van. The boys jump into the truck fumbling with their information packets. The meeting was informative Stacey gathers.

Dan's friends are dropped in Weberston. The radio plays its tune all the way to Stacey's garage. George is waiting at home. Dan goes into his room for the evening.

Today, according to plan, the guys are meeting George before school for help with their job applications. He knows the correct way to complete them because of experience doing applications for his insurance business. With his job application Dan meets his friends in the student center, they are ready with pencils and applications. George will be arriving shortly.

George begins by categorizing every piece of information on a spare piece of paper. First, name, date, all personal information, place of birth and present address is put on it. Then other categories are included like

previous education and jobs. Last thing to do is write ideas about the job they'll be doing and put them on the last page of the application. He asks if the information looks neat enough on the scratch paper before beginning the form. They think his example is excellent but have limited time. He instructs to type the final one as their meeting ends.

The guys will be going to the maintenance company after school. They have worn their older clothing for their orientation. Dan, Bill, Clay, Mike and Jody are prepared. George said he'd transport them. Stacey did it last time.

After school they wait near the cafe and talk before George gets there. He appears at the door just after three to meet them.

Arriving in Hargrove without delay they meet Erick outside the maintenance company building. He has maps of places the young gentlemen will work eventually in his hand. Erick begins an orienteering class in the parking area to get them familiarized with the territory. Clay takes the maps from Erick and passes them around. He passes a map to Jody first. Jody and he are close friends. He has been standing by himself most of the afternoon, behind everyone. Clay figures he must be tired from his last workout. A compass is needed to follow the instructions, they receive one too.

This lesson concerns communicating an exact location using the map's letters and numbers. Communication skills will be important when using radios. Determining if there are underground objects is important too. Pipes and wires can be obstructing. The worker must be careful explains Erick and passes them a list of radio codes to study later but says it isn't crucial to remember them all. A thoughtful worker keeps dirt and rock out of traffic he adds.

George decides to return to his office in Weberston, the boy's lesson should take about an hour. He moved into this office about two months ago. It is spacious with a lobby, four desks, a small kitchenette and a lunch room. The interior has high ceilings and tie back drapes on the windows. The office is fancy enough for insurance sales but it doesn't have any equipment like Keith's.

By the time the guys should be finished with their orientation George is waiting at the utilities company parking lot. They liked Erick and the orientation but look ready to go home. He and Dan arrive at Stacey's shortly after dropping his friends.

After classes is their first trial day, Dan manages to make his usual meeting with his friends in front of school this morning although he had a tough time getting out of bed.

During lunch the young men go for a sandwich and something to drink at the cafe. Liz is outside. Dan motions her to enter. She does and sits next to the guys. Dan tells her about his new job. He holds his menu open while talking because the waitress takes orders only when all the menus are sitting on the table. He is trying to buy time with her.

Lunch hour at the cafe is busy, they usually don't stay their entire break. Dan says he's sorry about wasting time to his friends. They assure him it's no bother as they begin walking to class. Liz is really interested in Dan, it shows but she won't be talking to him again until tomorrow. The guys share stories about her on their way to class.

Dan has a lot of homework, he is glad the trial work will only be for two days.

After their remainder of classes they meet after school to wait for George. He was voted ride master by Erick and Stacey. He doesn't mind because his vehicle is good, they won't have any trouble. In a few minutes the station wagon pulls up along the curb and they begin their drive toward Hargrove. George looks proud to be ride master.

Dan, Mike, Bob, Jody, Bill and Clay knock on Erick's office door. He greets the young men with a handshake upon their arrival.

The plan is to check applications and arrange work schedules. They enter Erick's office and assemble like a small business meeting. He reads the boys applications. Clay was the first to complete his and made it neat in black ink. Neatness is the most important quality in an employee, he especially likes Clay's. The other boys didn't have everything written on their applications yet. They are going to finish theirs later.

A sponsor greets them, He is an employee that has been in the company for a few years assigned to assist new employees. Chris is their sponsor.

There are maintenance trucks parked in the yard. Everyone employed by the utilities company needs to be certified in operating a maintenance truck. They have many gears and different tool options such as lifts, dumpers, underground service blowers and vacuums for example. The blue van is Chris's.

George takes a drive to get a second look at his property before he needs to return.

Erick's idea to make his job more enjoyable is underway. He is excited to have the opportunity to work with the young men and gives them an extra star for being punctual. After completing school he spent a few years employed by the company and his social life became dull. He is the youngest employed by the company and an only child who'd always been studious rarely trying to impress anyone. His friends were mostly only acquaintances, he managed without sustaining the relationships. He wants lasting brother-like relationships and to work with guys his age instead of doing the diverse lonely tasks offered to him presently.

The meeting in Erick's office for many reasons was important to Chris. Very complicated control harnesses and gas piping is around the operating system, it's continually active. Below the turbines that connect with bylines and automated transformers were buzzing today. During peak usage everything always sustained. "It's incredible," Erick says to Bob "the workers never say hard-to-find." All chandlery around here is stored and obtainable, able to be used easily. A worker was particularly interested in the meter on

their main pipe that expatiates beyond the lake for a distance. They're standing in there as she watches the machinery automatically chart and appropriate the fuel from the readings. "You think? It's a versatile and established semblance." They scarcely hear her talk and he says "don't worry, it doesn't take much additional fixing, the computer does an occasional trick." The staff likes to meet any new recruits.

During their meeting they planned to go with Erick to a site near the pipe a ways from the utilities station and the street where construction has been happening so he can show them how organized their operations are.

Upon arriving there sits the auger truck. It is used for drilling holes in the ground. A worker manipulates levers and controls hydraulics for the guys. The entire truck bounces and vibrates. In the cab of the rig all the controls look complicated but he doesn't try to explain any of it to the guys yet.

The operator says, "If employees wander off they can hear the auger truck easily when it makes a well. It pulls chunky pieces of granite and soil from the ground with so much torque when it's at top speed if it lugs it's loud as thunder."

From the cab of the truck Bob can see the site and Chris who is sitting on the bumper. Dan sits down with Chris and pulls a snack from a paper sack. Jody realizes it's time for the break when the other boys are talking to Dan and Chris. They share in conversation before going back to the maintenance yard.

Chris had mentioned they'd probably be finishing early but they had spent a lot of time with their sodas talking. Chris had a feeling it would happen that way and he tried to save as much time as available. They knew the temperature this afternoon would reach the quitting point early.

Returning home they stop near the corner of Power Station road and Reservoir street where there is a wellhead, workers often stop there to get a drink.

They travel another mile to return the truck and just as they're almost finished with the meeting they hear an engine cranking over. Every summer when it gets dry the area around the maintenance lot has to be cleared. Chris comes driving a "Grading machine" minutes later and stops near the group to point out the different controls."

When he said "Grading machine" the word "grading" made the boys think twice. Thoughts of final test day filled their heads. Erick looks with a smile on his face and assures them they are only doing the last finishing touches.

Erick tells the guys they'll be doing more work after graduation when the company accepts his proposals. He has started them on the right track. George is already waiting, quickly their on the way back to Weberston.

Upon returning home his mom asks, "how was work today Daniel?" After describing his day he retires to bed.

3. Hustle and bustle

In the morning Liz calls Dan. They have become good friends, she calls him often. He is handsome she thinks. He tells her he wants to be friends and say they can pal around together when he gets his driver's license, explaining today he'll be driving. His plans sound exciting.

Dan finds time to stop at the auto parts store after school. He is planning to do work on his mother's truck so he may use it more in the future. He purchases tune-up parts, a small instruction book and arrives at the cafe before his mom is expected to depart. He sits and orders a burger with fries and a shake. Eating fast expecting her to be ready soon was a mistake. He sits solemnly a few minutes before picking up a copy of the Weberston Crier from the table in the corner left behind by morning customers. Bringing it back to his table, he thumbs through its pages. Finally she throws her apron into the hamper behind the kitchen and motions to Dan as she heads toward the door. He takes his bag of parts, instruction book and the copy of the paper and exits the cafe with his mom. Dan hops in to the front seat and she climbs in the passenger side.

During their drive home he expresses his interest in the automobile after she asks him what he has in the bag.

He begins the tune-up according to the book he found in the store. After he removes the old spark plugs he installs the new parts. The truck is simple and it doesn't take long to complete the job. He gets his mom to agree upon going on a highway test drive. The truck needed improvements and she thanks him for the help.

It is beautiful driving through the country. Along many stretches of the highway the wildlife is completely undisturbed. The plant has been fired up recently it appears, to the west steam is rising above it. Stacey never took notice before but now Dan is behind the wheel. It is a nice day.

Dan decides to drive into town and find a friend so they take a back street from the highway. He tells his mom about a picture in the paper of a man who looks like Liz's father. Dan is interested because the man in the picture in an important employee of the facility, although part of the article was missing from the paper.

The first person Dan sees upon arriving in town is Joan. He drives to where she's sitting and looks out the window. "How's the experience with the work crew, get your new job?" she says. Enthusiastically he answers "yes," he's surprised others have been talking. "sounds like you're happy, must have got a good crew." She says, "Put some muscles on Jody, don't work Bob too hard, Bill's neat, I'm sure Mike will be impressed." "Where's Liz?" "Visiting friends." "I'm on my way to the arcade. I found a new article in the paper of a person that might help with the job. I think they know him in town," he says.

Dan found Bob at the arcade and shows him the article. They all agree, even Stacey, that the man does look like he

could be related to Liz. He was the first recruit to be offered the job and he wants to be industrious. Dan's main interest in his new job is to help people, being around George, Erick and the work place is fun to him. His mother inquires about their studies on the way home to be certain they'll be focused on test day. George was on the telephone so Dan begins his school assignments right away instead of calling friends.

The remainder of the week days are school days as usual. Friday's homework is completed then the guys have the weekend free.

Since they were young, weekends have been a good time to get together. They grew up in their small neighborhood and have been friends for as long as they can practically remember. Each one encountered hard times and bad days where they felt left out but remained part of the same gang to the rest of Weberston. They were a group of boys roaming free in the country without boundaries. If only they knew how special their childhood together is or was but now each one is becoming appealing because they're becoming more mature. It is fortunate that the community finds interest in them. Play is important, everyone doesn't always keep to business.

Their weekends had been filled with childish activities one of which is fishing at the river. It's an activity they'd never imagine having no time to do and it's relaxing. A couple times a month in the warmer seasons it is a pleasant get away from chores and town gossip.

Dan walks into town with a small fishing pole over his shoulder. He and Bob want to try fishing this afternoon. The others are on the way to the cafe too. Just as Mike and Jody appear in town, an Indian man meets them. He is interested in their being new members of the service company. He told them an interesting story about his struggle while he was younger. After talking with him a while they find him to be understanding of their situation. He states broadly that once he had problems but today has good credit. To them the man seemed disordered but they have second thoughts because he was congenial. The usuals at the cafe are joking and gossiping, part of their regular activity. They're accustomed to the teenage clan. The man stepped into a nearby store as they entered the restaurant, they were happy to talk with him but were in a hurry. After getting organized, they invited Liz and hop into Bill's car. Near Liz's their trail begins at an abandoned fire road. It's two miles to the river on the trail. Trees and logs cross it wherever it hasn't been maintained. The level ground slowly dips downhill toward the river. The journey goes through underbrush so thick it takes them a half hour to travel a hundred yards. Eventually a fraction of a mile away the river comes into view.

They get to the river and find rocks to sit on and cast line into the water. Bob checks to see if while foraging through the brush any bait has been lost. After talking a while the fish start biting. A couple fish are pulled from their watery home. Then an hour goes by during which nobody received any bites but Liz talked about her father Jim to

Dan. They quit fishing, pack up the supplies and begin on their way to Stacey's where the car is parked.

Returning is the same as it was going lots of bushes and timely hiking. They arrive at Bob's car about five in the evening. It has been an active day for them. Dan stays home and everyone else returns to a crowded Weberston.

In the morning the day begins the usual way with the singing of the mocking bird and coffee brewing. Dan is expecting a message from Erick about when they'll begin summer employment. His friends arrive in Mike's car talking about what a bummer it is having finals soon and how good they'll feel when school's out.

George is working on late business in the study and has had the phone tied up most of the morning. Dan is glad when the phone is finally free.

Stacey noticing the boys capping on each other for the last hour and attributes their behavior to anxiousness.

Erick calls, George relays the plan to the boys. They'll meet later to figure the exact date to begin. They feel relieved knowing they'll easily be able to balance their schedules. It is best to refrain from long hours until after a test day.

They have brunch in Dan's back yard. Sitting at the table Nubby brings Jody the bone he's been chewing on. He loves attention and struts through the yard looking proud. Bob, Mike and Jody like spending time at Dan's. Bill and Mike are expected to call later.

Stacey and George have decided upon becoming husband and wife. They would have an easy going relationship and life together they felt. The guys were fishing when their decision was made. Once the word got out instantly the town, everybody knew about their plans. They were the talk of the town. It was definitely not the first time a couple has been specially introduced. Every year a few couples are put on the pedestal. They made a sigh of relief when the church accepted their plans. She had been a member for a number of years.

Saturday the guys are together. Dan, Mike and Bob are at the cafe having sodas and waiting for Liz who's shopping when Bill enters. He quickly asks Dan when work will be starting. Erick has the schedules, George probably doesn't remember them.

Susan is working her Saturday shift. She walks up to their table and asks them what they would like. They haven't decided what they want to eat so she says, "it'll be water for now?", then walks to the adjacent table where customers had just seated themselves. The people are interesting looking. The man is wearing a western hat and the lady has a dress on. There are two boys sporting western clothes too. Susan stands at their table as they look at the menu. The man orders three cheese burgers and a sandwich for her. She asks if they're from out of town and the lady answers, "We live in Bloomview," with a smile on her face. Susan's dream is to live in Bloomview. She says, "I hope you like your meal." The man has an approving look on his

face. He has been to the cafe plenty of times but during the week. The lady says "thanks." Susan runs to the kitchen with their order and gives it to the chef and returns to the students table for their orders.

Their orders arrive faster than the other people's and they eat quickly to leave time to compare notes for the finals. Susan returns to ask them about school. Dan tells her about his classes and she construes he wanted to stay home to study. It sounds to his friends like he doesn't want to get too personal. The other people's food arrives fast but the guys are almost already finished.

George and Erick are entering the cafe but Liz isn't there yet. They sit in the booth next to the boys. Erick tells them he would like to start work this Monday. Even though graduation is soon the boys wonder if they will have enough time for homework. George asks Dan if the schedule is fine with him. He answers with "I'm not sure" and invites the men to their table. Erick begins to tell the boys about the work they'll be doing and then laughs. Quickly George interjects to let them know they only had planned to excite them, they're only kidding them. Work won't begin until sometime after summer vacation has begun!

Dan asks George how he got away from his mom before lunch. George told her he had promised to see Sam this afternoon. It's a lie but he used it as a protective excuse.

Stacey lives for the weekends. George didn't know how to tell her he'd rather be with Erick. He'd already been with him plenty this week. He was afraid she wouldn't like his plans. The gang leaves the small booth with a few pages of the sports section and moves to one of the larger round tables in the middle of the dining room. Sitting at the round table Erick uses the situation to examine the character of the boys. Dan tells Mike he thinks Erick likes him best. The guys that heard him smile and try to hide their laughter. Erick acts unaware of their foolery. It doesn't bother Mike he's patient.

George sees Liz looking in the front window and points at Dan. She smiles then enters and casually walks toward their table.

After talking for an hour it's time for George and Erick to leave. Dan, Liz and friends walk to the arcade, play games and make plans for tomorrow. Dan and Liz exit the arcade as the rest of the gang makes remarks to Dan, good remarks!

Sunday Mike has already finished studying, but everyone else is behind. He's been programming his computer for a large part of the week. The saying, "when you're having fun time flies," remains true in this case. Every class demands study before the finals and they don't want to make any mistakes. Probably the most important part of their lives rests on the last tests of the school season.

After everyone's day errands and studying has been completed the television occupies Dan and Liz while Stacey does housework. George decides to leave, he had been quieter than usual this evening after Liz had arrived.

Dan is at a loss for words. He asks his mom if they could take the truck for a movie or "something." She wants to know exactly what "something" is. Dan means the arcade, ice cream, hanging out and etc. She says "Ok, for a movie or desert shop." Liz wants ice cream.

He agrees ice cream sounds good. They get into the truck to drive to town. Their town is small and she can drive anywhere except the highway. He is lucky to have Liz as a girlfriend, he already has his learner's permit.

Weberston is a nice place in the evening. The air is warm and blowing lightly. There is a constant breeze because the town is on a mesa. Outside the soda shop a willow tree gently filters out the air and makes shade for three wooden benches. It's a welcome sight on a hot day for passer-byers. Many people often sit outside on the benches at the side of the building sipping on different beverages. A small wood fence divides the neighbor's lot from the cement patio where the busy shop is.

The soda shop is located near a large building on the corner of Weberston road and highway eight, everyone knows it has the best vanilla ice cream. The front of the shop is mostly widows painted with red boarders and designs. It says "SODA" on the center of the window, with "Ice Cream," just below.

Dan orders four scoops in a dish with all kinds of toppings. Liz orders a banana split. Their ice cream is definitely the best.

Conversations linger on as Dan and Liz hold each other's hands in the shade. Bob and other friends from school had met them at the bench. Clans of teenagers from the nearby neighborhoods often hang out there with them too.

Upon completing their sodas she starts the truck and they return to her house. Immediately as she jumps out of the truck, she walks to the passenger's side and kisses Dan on the cheek. Chills run up and down their spines. Liz skips all the way to her front door.

Dan drives his mom's pickup home. It starts quickly and he backs from the driveway putting his pedal to the metal. The clutch not the gas! He feels uneasy and has a hard time at first. The truck runs along the road making bumping noises to the beat of potholes in the pavement.

His luck keeps the vehicle on the road. Occasionally when he shifts the truck lets out horrendous backfires. He tries to use the clutch in a purposeful manner and control his shifts.

The engine runs to a high speed then drops down abruptly as he tries to shift gears. The road has potholes that make the vehicle bounce terribly. He now believes his mom must be a good driver because he had never noticed many of the holes in the road before. The look on her face as he pulls into the garage expresses teaching him to drive so her truck will see better days.

Still at the soda shop where he met Dan, Bob starts his car to drive around town. He says, "Whoever wants to?" and waves his arms to get a response quickly. Excitement about summer makes them oblivious to a painful Sunday drive. The town abounds with bumpy streets and his little car doesn't

handle well. After a couple hours he drops his friends at their residences and returns home.

Late in the evening George returns home, Stacey goes to bed and Dan is on the phone giving homework answers to his friends. Everyone agrees they made the most of the day and had a fun time as well.

Upon entering his room he puts his homework underneath his bed. His science homework is already completed but his math needs work. He had twenty-five problems to complete and some reading. Math was not as simple as he thought but he did complete it. His other class is reading a novel, it needs to be finished during the week but he has read the thirty pages assigned. The teacher doesn't care when they complete it as long as it's before the deadline.

He always studies as much as possible.

This week is the last week of formal classes before summer vacation. Most students are using their time to prepare for final exams.

Dan has a routine that he follows every morning before meeting his classmates. He takes a shower, looks in the mirror for a few minutes to check his clothing and hair style then makes breakfast and a bag lunch. When he is satisfied he looks good enough he's en'route to the bus stop near Liz's quickly. Near the steps of the school he meets his friends. They make conversation as other students arrive before class. Bob, Jody, Bill and Clay share gossip as Liz meets Joan on her walk to class. They will have to move fast to be in class on time, the school flag is raising just before eight o'clock. Excitement is high before summer vacation.

Riley expects every student to appear on time and not interrupt the lecture. English class is the easiest class of the day to enter late, it begins promptly and being on time is important.

The majority of students ride share to school. Most won't receive cars until after they graduate, routines vary. Bob prepares quickly and cold cereal with a quick comb of the hair is usually enough for him. He lives nearby and the walk takes only a couple minutes. Jody, Bill and Clay have lunch in the school's cafeteria. They don't make lunch in the mornings.

Chris checks to make sure the guys are in class. Only graduates will have a chance at becoming employees with benefits, Hargrove utilities need a good reputation. Arriving on time is important and they're giving it much effort.

They are invited to Chris's after school for an end of school year talk, they wait on the steps in front of school after classes for him to arrive. He arrives shortly after they get there. The blue van is carpeted and has fancy captain seats. His house is located a mile from Weberston towards Hargrove. From there the utility service towers are partially visible. He lives in a fairly new looking house. It's on a street with about ten or fifteen other homes and is the only one with a fence in front. An oak tree two feet in diameter is growing in the front yard.

Three cement steps lead to the front door. A lawn has been kept in good shape underneath the tree. The house has a garage big enough for the van, work space and storage. It's a little boxy looking but cozy home with three rooms, kitchen and living room. In the living room a television is next to a coffee table and he has curtains on all the windows. One old sofa that is velour and colored sits in the corner. The kitchen floor is off-white linoleum. The only house plant's leaves have lost their pigment from lack of light.

This is the first casual get together of the company. Dan is sitting on the sofa with his legs stretched keeping his feet off the carpet. At the coffee table Bob sits in a hard chair watching the television. Commercials are playing, he sits back looking at Dan. Bill sits at the other side of the coffee table across from Bob. Chris walks in looking at the television then returns to the kitchen to check the oven. The aroma of cookies has filled the air as everyone discusses Dan's relationship with Liz. Bob laughs about the evening they went for sodas. Jody takes a couple plates from the cabinet and puts chairs around the table. The television volume is low enough to keep it from distracting them. They feel Chris is a friendly host. The guys are always having fun and like other students have been studying diligently.

On the block, nearby Chris's home, is the catering truck. During their get together they've noticed a party happening. It's surprising to them because of the small number of houses in this

suburb, they hadn't expected the viewing. Stacey would be interested in the impressiveness of the arrangements. They talked about it on their return to Weberston and wondered if they were catering grad night.

Tuesday Stacey travels with George, Sam and Keith to take a look at model homes. He has developed a few homes in Bloomview and it's a nice day to look and decide on ideas and designs for planning George's project. Leaving Weberston they pass the highway. The closer they get to Bloomview the easier it is to see the mountains to the north. The town is in the foothills after driving through the valley from Weberston. From the highway small areas of farmland can be seen carved out of the woodlands. The trip doesn't take much time. As they drive through a maze of streets in Bloomview Keith assures them he's not lost then turns down a narrow drive that quickly opens to a subdivision with ranch-style homes. They park the vehicle to look at a few different plans and prefabricated homes. Discussing the designs Keith gets a good picture of George's interests. Sam makes a quick list and hands it to Keith. Estimating the completed cost is tough but he tries with the best of his ability and experience. They talk while they have time to look more and then return to the car.

At the cafe everyone sits inside at the first available table. George, Keith Sam and Stacey, after "Beating around the bush," ask Susan what the special of the day is. She

smiles and says "I knew you'd get to the point soon." Their orders are taken as she prepares the table.

George expresses his belief that adults shouldn't let on about their hunger during business unless the topic is gracefully at hand. Everyone tends to agree.

Entering the cafe a group of customers wave to Keith. He has been in town years, many know him. His ideas are impressing George and Sam too.

Wednesday Dan's mom is willing to give rides to his friends for final test day at Tellebooth High before her morning shift. He calls his friends then climbs into the driver's seat of the truck to warm it up before she is ready to leave. Liz stands at the edge of the road beside the oak tree. She has a brown bag lunch in her grasp. They come to a stop and Liz jumps in trying to keep dust out of her hair. Stacey accelerates slowly. The old gearbox sounds make the frame vibrate. It's rough sounding but healthy. Dan tells Liz it's a good thing she got to the oak tree early because everyone needs to arrive at school on time. Liz looks at him and replies, "The bus would have picked me up shortly," jokingly. Bumping along the road Dan's mother reminds him to meet her at the cafe after school if they want a ride. She makes a few other stops at Dan's request then drops them at school.

Brunch today is thirty minutes instead of the usual fifteen, the students have gone to their cliques with horror stories to tell. English class produced the worst.

The class bell rings to announce the end of the break and everyone hopes they're prepared.

Test time is upon them. Dan feels prepared. Class finals contain a few hundred questions. Jody is worried although he prepared thoroughly.

Outside the classroom Jody, Mike and Bill study their notes while Dan watches through the doorway. He spent hours memorizing science. It takes a long time for the teacher to start the test and that gives them an advantage.

Following their tests at lunch students share more opinions while eating and talking about how great summer will be. Walking towards class they try to silent their laughter keeping in mind the seriousness of the day. Social studies becomes the topic as they stand apprehensively outside their room ten minutes until lunch officially ends. Only two more classes until school's out for the seniors.

Students slowly get from outside to their desks in a controlled fashion. The teacher goes down the list calling one name after another to enter them into class. The class is large, it takes time. She assigns the bad students front row seats, so cheating will be almost impossible.

Classmates peer around occasionally and she makes it clear that anyone caught cheating will receive an "F" on the final.

Dan goes to the school 's front steps after completing his exams. The tenseness and pressure that gripped the school in the morning has subsided and the students feel more at ease. He meets friends who invite him to party but

he explains his mother's waiting for him at work and he hasn't much time.

It is the Wednesday every senior has been waiting for since they bought their calendars and planned their schedules. It is senior ball Wednesday, the motivating factor that pulled most seniors through the last of their tests. In the evening the Senior Ball is happening at Tellebooth High. Although seniors don't need to appear in class today the school is open another week for the rest of the students.

Chris has invited everyone to freshen up a little at his home. He uses his van to pick them up instead of Erick.

In Chris's dining room they sit crunching on chips and dip. Music is playing, a party has started. Bill goes to the refrigerator, it's full of stuff. Chris laughs at Bill and hears about Mike's experience with computers as they connect a video game to the television. He remembers years back when the same situation was his avenue to life. Chris's home is happening. They take the

van to the senior ball.

Approaching the school Dan spots Liz at the refreshment stand. He puts his arm through the window to motion her as Chris parks near the center of the school's parking lot. She watches the blue van not sure who's waving than casually walks toward it. She's never seen the van before. With the door open they cheer to bystanders on the school's front lawn adjacent to the lot. Lots of people are walking nearby. The school's gym is lighted and a band's equipment is set up. A line is forming at the doors. Students are checking their tickets. The dance starts in fifteen minutes.

Chris talks with a few other guys in the parking lot. He had friends that attended Tellebooth High during his graduation from high school a few years ago. One boy says he is related to one of them.

The band begins to play loud, the doors open and people start to enter. Dancing begins at a slow pace but soon everyone is swinging. The entire dance floor is packed and different groups are standing to the side talking. Refreshments are being served constantly. At the end of the evening the homecoming queen kisses her sweetheart and the crowd cheers. The catering people didn't handle the event but the school staff did a great job nonetheless. Late in the evening they exit with Chris. It was a very fun time.

Returning home they listen to the radio in the van as they cruise back streets. Chris parks next to the fence in front of his house and Bob drives the remainder of his friends home. They had a memorable day, a day that they will remember for years.

4. A memorable summer

It's officially the first day of summer for the students at Tellebooth High and at home in the morning the television news is reporting problems at Hargrove maintenance. "What's on the news?" Dan's mother inquires. A demonstration about treatment of labor at Hargrove is happening. Demonstrations are a way to get attention but also a good way to accomplish nothing. They watched and wondered if it could affect his job. The day went as usual yesterday, there wasn't any problem. Reporters say engineers are being told business is too slow and to reduce hiring and/or lay-off. Workers say the plant has engineers that aren't being careful enough to keep their proponents. The situation doesn't look good for the engineers and they're complaining too. The picture shows a loud and unruly crowd gathering at the front gates. The camera crew zoomed in on one person, the man they had met while on the way to fish. He says "I understand businesses yet I'm having a hard time with being hired." "I'm here because this is my first chance to get the public's attention, that is why." Behind him people are standing and holding signs and banners. They're waiting for a guy to arrive with financial statistics and reports. The newscaster implies it may be a long time before a settlement in a monotonous manner. "More coverage later," then the station begins commercials.

A group of town's people is in the school's multipurpose room preparing for a bus tour to Hargrove. Junior reporters and journalists of Tellebooth High have decided to go along and the school staff has decided to supervise the outing and make sure everything goes as planned. At lunchtime an exhibit in the school's multipurpose room will be held when the students return

from Hargrove. The exhibit will cover topics of the engineer's complaint against the administration of the company too. It starts with a slide show and speakers lecture. The crowd watches a recording of the local television news cast made the evening before. Because he has been recently employed by a department of the company Dan is interested in the debate and the demonstration. Upon arriving he realizes there's many people and hopes the plans they've made for after summer are sound. Some people ask him about the situation but because he thought the story on television this morning was unsound he doesn't answer. There must be one hundred and fifty people in the school's multipurpose room. Many participants are coming forward with their individual points of view.

The junior journalists are interviewing and taking pictures. Erick stands at the podium ready to discuss everything he knows. The press wants to hear. Dan listens carefully, his interest is inspiring to the audience. Surely it's a learning experience.

Dan's social studies teacher Pat finds him mixing in the crowd and explains, "most older workers are more experienced, that is a large part of pay structure even if the worker is affiliated with a union for the position." A

person standing beside Dan mentions that the executives can plan an entire months business to be performed when they're not around. The most important people running the company are only there a couple of hours a day. Dan's social studies teacher refers to one of her slavery studies in class for an example. "The leaders or people with control always make more money", she tries to explain although it's too noisy to hear anything.

Dan is surprised when he finds George at the door to the multi-purpose room. George says he was interested in the debate and Erick had invited him. They stand in the hallway a few minutes before locating seats that are vacant. Taking seats they talk more until Bob walks up to Dan with another man, Jim. George asks if he works for the company or is a school employee and finds he is a representative from Hargrove. Bob tells Jim that Dan found an article in the paper with his picture a few days before, instantaneously Dan remembers his face. He says, "You're the fuel manager!" He smiles because of Dan's recognition then nods his head after Dan introduces George too.

George shakes hands with Jim introducing himself as a new employee too and asks how long he's been with the company. He asks George if he remembers an article in the paper a couple years ago about a group lost in the woods near Weberston. He looks at Dan amazed. They were just talking about it a few weeks back.

Jim recalls at the start of his employment there was a large storm. He was called to work that day and found himself following a duct to work on the farmer's reservoir. During heavy run-off a group of workers are needed to control equipment there, the rain was terrible. They were there daily more than a couple days so when the farmer finally showed up he was listening to a vehicle's radio and told him they were safe but the fields wouldn't be if his gates weren't fixed. He had asked Hargrove maintenance to keep people out and watch the flood gates there as a side job for some guys. The farmer worried a lot about the business of others on his land at the time. To make him feel better the Weberston Crier publicized their stay, the company hadn't bargained for, and during the year the county and private people were trying to buy his land anyways. No-trespassing signs went up around his property. It's a story the farmer tells often. From Weberston following the road toward Stacey's there are many signs at turn-offs and along the road.

"You must see the dam," says Jim, "almost every employee has at one time or another. I think it's one of the reasons the old-timers stay around here." "Good fishing?" Bill replies.

Hargrove has many employees that have worked long hours most of their career in engineering. This summer the boys want a job where they can get exercise and a tan. Chris and Erick meet Jim and the boys at the exit from the multipurpose room. Erick tells them their help the last couple days was appreciated and the company's rules specify a two-week vacation beginning the same day as the local schools. The crew doesn't want to wait to make a few bucks

but are happy they'll be able to spend time with their summer friends. Chris assures them they'll have lots of work to do after the vacation. The meeting continues with interviews and talk. Dan and his friends don't want to hang around if they're not needed and disappear onto the campus.

In the parking lot groups of students are hanging around praising their cars and waiting for certain test scores as Dan walks casually to meet Liz at a bench near the front lawn. After talking a few minutes they begin walking towards the cafe.

Stacey doesn't notice them as they seat themselves in the corner of the diner. Dan and Liz sit quietly until she comes to that side and spots them. She has a large smile on her face as she shares Liz's excitement about her beginning of summer vacation. He has already had many days of rest. Actually realizing it's summer hadn't dawned on her yet but she's glad schools out, anyways it's beginning to show on their faces.

They talk before his mom is ready to depart then get into the truck for the ride home. Near the oak tree Liz gets out thanking her for the ride. Arriving home Dan turns on the television to see if there's any more news interesting to him.

Nobody heard anything from Erick or the company during their break probably because none of the management would be working during their vacation for a few weeks, but their employment would begin again. After the vacation George and Dan managed to collect the new employees and get them to the company meeting room upon the date they were supposed to be back at the Hargrove maintenance Company. Their agenda for the month hadn't yet been decided.

Dan entered the room first, the rest of the guys followed. Chris, Erick and the boys weren't as talkative as before the vacation but Jim was. He entered through the door to the office quietly whistling and singing a tune about "once you walk under a silvery moon, something etc" then stood in front of the group smiling. Standing at the end of the table he says, "Did you like what you saw?" Jody being the first to answer says, "What do you mean," with an inquisitive tone in his voice. "The dam," says Jim. Bob spoke up saying, "we didn't mean to trespass," and then adds, "we only wanted to fish."

Two days after Dan received his license they had found the dam. It was in the hills at the end of a dirt road that lead somewhere behind George's property to the back of Hargrove a few miles from a site they worked at before their last meeting with Erick and Chris. There they took a short walk and found the reservoir empty like an unoccupied stadium and the train tracks that lead away into the hills behind the facilities junction with train cars and supplies on the tracks. They were surprised by how fast the river filled up by rain that had fallen the night before. While walking down a trail back to Dan's vehicle they saw a yellow sedan disappear out of view behind an embankment. "That must have been you Jim," said Jody. Jim was in the vehicle and now he was expecting an answer about their opinion of

the situation. No one answered. The situation appeared unproductive to the untrained layman. "Don't worry they're only repairing it," He announced after a short pause. He reassured them the supplies weren't bothered and there was no need to worry because they wouldn't be working for the farmer.

Erick said he could tell by the look on their faces who was ready to work and who wasn't. At least they weren't in trouble! Talking began filling the room like their meetings before summer

began. Jody was relieved.

Their official break was basically as planned. Dan spent time with his friends and was with Liz frequently. School had been tough on them and even though they had plenty of summer before employment it was mostly hot, they went to the school recreation center during break as much as possible.

Chris was impressed, their meeting coincided with the planned schedule. Erick wasn't impressed totally though because the farmer was a problem he explained. He always complained to maintenance anytime he suspected trespassers. They guys didn't say much but waited for further information. They managed to talk about job issues at their meeting but social talk about summer delayed the planned topics. Liz and Dan, with his driver's license, had made it to town almost every night since he got it. When it came to business everyone was interested foremost in the promotion being put on by Hargrove Maintenance in Weberston tomorrow despite the lay-offs and problems at the company.

The Hargrove maintenance service is the largest company in the area. One day each summer they show their equipment on a street near downtown. The fire department and others usually join too.

The town people call the promotion a party because it's the only annual street event. The guys and passersby are having their pictures taken with the equipment. Stacey and George have

their own business to attend to today. Almost everyone in town is attending the party. Every employee wants to see the pictures on display of them and the auger truck since last year. Their displays have many pictures and informative stuff. The downtown area and nearby streets are packed with cars and people. Lots of them are at the cafe and browsing and shopping nearby.

Dan stands leaning against the stop sign at the corner near the group of new employees. He has a perfect view of the truck and because of Jim they get more good pictures of Dan and his daughter too. Erick is nowhere to be found but he was in town earlier.

All the excitement has the cafe completely packed and as the guys enter they find Stacey who has the particular look of somebody who's making money. George gets a bright look from

her as he enters. She appears for the moment "satisfied," career speaking of course. As they sit in the cafe Sam enters and says to George, "We got it complete."

George looks puzzled for a moment, and then he says "the abatement to help build the house." The talk about it is interesting and afterwards he says, "anyone who works for Erick can get one too," sort of humorously. The guys chuckle then continue verbally prodding each other.

Chris meets the guys after finishing his sandwich lunch. He had been at the counter since the beginning of his break. Needing help a block away he gets Jody and Bob to go with him.

Across the street George sees an old friend so he Liz, Dan and Mike return to the party, they were at the cafe throughout the entire afternoon rush. His friend is inside the art store talking to Marcie. They're trying to understand each other, there's more than the average amount of activity outside so the guys listen carefully over the noise to their conversation before making a decision to interrupt. She is eating a large lunch and the shop looks fixed up compared to normal business days. They all think she must have a lot of artistic ability and he mentions that as George was beginning to comment. She answers, "I got'a be, it takes my kind of person to do this job, it always does." It's not that she's in a picky mood Liz explains to Dan. The man and her laugh out loud. She thanks them for stopping, they return to the events with George.

The summer afternoon's heat and street parties continue until people have tired appearances.

On their way home Stacey and George find Dan and Liz walking toward the golf course. She pulls to the side of the road to give them a ride in the truck.

"The Hargrove Utility Promotion went great this year," says Dan, "it was very interesting." They all had a great time, that is what's important.

Dan waves to Liz as they drive away. She starts walking up her driveway.

In the evening Erick calls George, Dan answers. He greets Erick with excitement. Tomorrow is the ground breaking ceremony for George's new home. He was busy with those plans today, maybe next year he'll have more to do with the festivities. George tries not to appear overly excited. Stacey is happy it's quiet at her home today because the town was raging.

5. Together they stand

Sunday Stacey and George are expected to appear at the church in Bloomview. Much of the mass is standing in the courtyard as their seasonal lunch day begins. Dan is expecting Chris and others from the Hargrove Maintenance crew to show this morning too.

Upon acknowledgement of interest the father begins organizing an unorganized situation by gracefully covering the pretty topic of "love and angels," before the ceremony at the church today. After a short time the group had quieted and was following the subject inside a pamphlet the father had passed out. The steady attendees praised him for using different writings and quote to help with their understanding of the church's principals.

Dan and Erick pay attention as individuals do their "routines of reunification," a term that means basically contributing and came from the founders of the church years ago. The priest occasionally adds to the conversation but through reading and talk from fellows in the mass the objective of the father was understood easily. They talked of the ability to bring "things," people or objects, etc. together to achieve purity. The only reason for his involvement was to get his feelings known about making a difference in "self carma" that can attract understanding "others." He didn't want to speak too much during the ceremony but for them to examine the church's teachings.

"I want my contributions to be well planned and make sense to people, not necessarily the business," Dan tells Erick. Erick decides he'll probably get right in with the other employees at the company after hearing that. "It sounds like a wish for a miracle," Chris interjects.

The Bloomview church often has guests from the fieldwork division of the maintenance company. Chris now sits near the rear of the room. Dan meets a group that could fill a bus at the side of the chapel near the courtyard hallway. They had arrived after the invites and are surprised none of the food has been touched already. Everyone smiles as the guests try to find seats. After hearing about their previous discussion, many in the group wished they had arrived earlier.

"We are preparing a good lunch," says a woman. The guests from the maintenance company listen enthusiastically. Many have been to the lunches at this church before.

Before the lunch near the back of the room Chris talks to neighbors and the group of workers.

Chris manages the field divisions. Outside of Hargrove the street where he lives has small homes where many of the church participants live close to the maintenance company. This church is a great place for them to congregate occasionally. He rarely makes it to church.

Erick is the only employee Dan sees regularly at mass. Dan helps him with the church study material as he glances at it. He likes to meet with different people from the company occasionally and is interested in all types of faiths. He is surprised to see Chris today.

Liz and Stacey have found a table in the corner to relax until lunch. She expresses an interest in working for the company to her but feels she is just too petite to do that kind of work.

She really just wants to be with Dan.

Stacey decides and then looks with a smile in his direction.

By now everyone is starting to drift towards their table. "I guess we're in the dining room," Liz says. In a few minutes all the other tables are occupied. The churchgoers seem to herd around together, even on weekdays, Liz has begun to notice.

Chris sits with the guys from the company. Dan and George join Liz and Stacey.

With his usual humorous manner George makes himself appear as if he's a very important guest. Stacey is embarrassed for an instant until someone sitting nearby stands and holds the entire crowd to let him take the first bite before anyone else. That's when the church group became loud and talkative again.

Church lunches are a great opportunity for individuals involved to share talk about community events, ceremony meanings and relate with each other. It's tough being the relaxed person he usually is with all the excitement but George and Stacey wait until the appropriate moment to recognize themselves as a seriously engaged couple. Their wedding was planned for later and at the lunch there was plenty of talk but all of the friends they invited were there. As he passes commencements to friends they shake hands with him and Stacey gets compliments about how good her looks are today. They both feel really great about their plans to be married. By this time the crowd has moved to their side of the room where talk and laughter has become outrageous. People are talking about their experiences with family, weddings, married life and everything else associated with matrimony. The food gets consumed long before their conversations cease.

Chris and the other employees leave early because on Sundays activities often clash with church services, they have to stay open regardless.

The first improvements on George's home will begin Monday, Keith is boasting.

Before the lunch is over Sam appears at the door to see George this afternoon. Stacey shows him who's entering. He had heard about the lunch and their party from a guest that was near the street as he passed the church. With a friendly handshake he congratulates him and expressed best wishes to Stacey then gets to talk with someone he hasn't seen for a long time.

Dan mentions to George that Jody and Bill stopped by. He has an enthusiastic look on his face as he thinks back to when Erick recruited them. Erick smirks after looking at him. Quickly, Sam seats himself.

After finishing the vows at the Bloomview church George, Stacey and company went to celebrate. As they do a lot the people from the party are having a local get-

together at the soda shop in town for the marriage reception.

The wedding ceremony was beautiful. Flowers, banners and decorative creations were throughout the chapel. Because George and Stacey are well known by the community the father recited his most precious prayer. Rose petals were thrown from the altars and music played softly. The witnesses were more than impressed. Sentiment rang the instant they kissed each other as man and wife. Leaving the chapel, everyone had great feelings.

Ice cream fountain treats are on every table as George has the best party he's ever known. With his wife at his side he's the happiest person in town this evening, hopefully forever. The look on his face makes Dan and Liz get bright eyes for each other, same with others who have joined too. Their friends are ecstatic and congratulate them wholeheartedly. One person says, "The town will never be the same," sarcastically. George replies, "No one will ever notice the difference." Folks hang around for while after the party, Liz and Dan practically close the parlor. Stacey believes the addition to the family will feel good. No one can deny George and Stacey have good intentions.

Since summer vacation most of Dan's friends are interested in relations of their own but are either going to be in school next year or are moving out of town.

This morning George wants to get on his way to Bloomview to work on his property. After breakfast and dropping Dan at Liz's he meets Erick and Keith there. When they arrive the contractor is already there with his crew. Everyone laughs and jokes most of the morning while they study the plans.

While on an outing to their usual fishing spot the guys found the Indian man parked along side an old bridge they walked past occasionally. They were on their way home and it was nice to see him because they hadn't caught anything or had excitement all day. Of course fishing wasn't the only thing they liked about the area near the river, many times they met other nearby residents as they hiked.

The man held an office in town. He was a financial referable, a creditor to help people obtain things. In the office it looked generally applied. His fantastic credit card collection hung on the

wall near the front door. Besides him it was basically the only other entertaining allurement there. It was in the most expensive building in town.

He had been parked downstream from where they were fishing almost the entire time. They found him interesting and apparently he wanted to talk to them as friends. He made them feel good because he said if they kept their jobs with the Hargrove Maintenance Service he could help them get many different credit cards and possibly even a bank loan in the future. It was the first time anybody had extended a real opportunity to them. He is a deal oriented person and had connected with them as friends outside of the Maintenance Company or personal relations just to make a possible dollar. It was a small town and it was obvious to

the man that they may need his help in the future. The boys thought that he may be imposing on them but he assured them their meeting was just by chance and he really hadn't followed them or anything like that, they didn't believe his story. Receiving a ride back to town from him they felt some excitement as they realized their importance in their community today. He said, "will catch ya later in town," as they exited his vehicle.

For the next couple months the town's summer happenings should progress as usual.

Stacey would put her time in at the cafe although she'd rather be out and about and the guys will work at the maintenance company.

All of them would make progress at the company especially Dan. If he keeps working he will be promoted to a manager soon, a position no one else had ever achieved in such a short time.

George dealt with the guys to help him with the construction of his home. They wanted to gain a little experience in that field and some extra money in their pockets. Most of George's new home got completed quickly.

Dan plans to enter college but not before year to two at the company. Liz wants to work at the cafe. Stacey's house is quieter now that George has moved to his new home in Bloomview.

6. The finale

They enjoyed their break, two weeks, that was the company's policy. Today they are needed, it's business as usual. The first few days on the job the guys would learn simple tasks.

The workers had been trying to position poles all year because of growing connections to outlying areas from the utilities unit. The guys had watched them reinforce many in town. After they get the proper safety clothes and equipment from Chris they stand at the side of the street with Erick as other workers arrive. Their attempt is to fabricate a way to get power to this area and their looking at the plans. Getting the biggest truck over the rocks to where the pole is supposed to be isn't effortless but because there's lots of employees the positioning of the auger is easier.

Chris, Dan and friends complete today's agenda before time to clock out. The maintenance vehicles are returned to the utilities company for storage. At Erick's office they have a discussion. Chris tells them their tasks should be completed easily on time. Erick agrees with Chris but they're going to have to work in order to gain interest from the supervisors. Chris's concern is employee comfort he explains in so many words but his idea of a completed job is also explained. Erick understands Chris's suggestions that it would be better to let them learn for themselves. The job sites for beginners aren't in public places and there's no need to be critical. The meeting was uncomplicated and they made plans for their next day. Upon adjourning their vehicles are waiting for the ride home.

Working is a new and fun experience for Dan. He always imagined having the ability to get his life in order. To Dan being able to work means letting go of yesterdays and creating a new

today, figuratively speaking. He wants to make money and have friends too, as many of them as possible. As a young employee he has yet to be the socialite the many of the others are but soon he will be attending a lot more meetings. He sees himself as a person able to organize the company for the benefit of himself and the other workers.

Liz is proud to have the opportunity for a wonderful summer with Dan, but he wants to work as much as possible and church might take the remainder of his time. Summer could be busy.

Dan was enthusiastic upon greeting Liz this afternoon. He didn't want to explain immediately but they had a casual evening.

At home he finds mom and George talking in the back yard and she gets him into a conversation about his job and he brings up the time Jim was singing in the office after summer break. It reminded her of the honeymoon they haven't gone on yet, time had just passed-by.

"Honeymoons can be exciting," Stacey says to George. He replies, "You're Kidding." Dan shyly says he would have gone on a honeymoon immediately, Stacey laughs. She doesn't like

going out of town and George hadn't felt like traveling. After having been talking they've deviated from Dan's topic and have dug up many of the travel pamphlets they acquired since the time of their engagement from Stacey's dresser. George and her had been into them a time before their wedding. They didn't want to be left with only spent credit cards and had saved some cash for the occasion. They sit in the back yard and discuss good travel plans while looking at their information packets. Dan suggests they see the referable's office in Weberston, his company could be beneficial in making their honeymoon more affordable. Even though Dan has much on his mind he lets his mom control the conversation.

Because of the students summer vacation, an increase in cafe business and George's home plans the time had not been right to leave town on short notice but now they were seriously

considering a few of the vacations offered. A month or so was remaining before school resumes so they told Dan to take care of the house then disappeared romantically where there wouldn't be any telephones, bills or disturbances.

At the beginning of George and his mom's honeymoon Dan was excited. He and his friends were happy to have an unparented place to relax. Every morning Liz would come to the back door about an hour before any of Dan's other friends. The phone was always buzzing with activity by the time the guys got there, but after a couple weeks Dan missed his mom's cooking

and cleaning around the house. Liz just didn't create the same vibration. He knew it would be that way from the time his parents put him in charge and he had been showing her the routine around the place.

Every day his friends would meet there before lunch, fishing or whatever. Usually when he and Liz returned there was the obvious giveaways of teen-age activity. Things like empty cans

and glasses, moved around yard stuff and fingerprints in the bathroom and on windows Liz took care of, he took care of the yard as usual. Summer has been great for Dan and Liz so far.

Because of Dan's parents honeymoon they all had more desire to work so they could have as much fun as George and Stacey. The students who would have classes this coming year

though it was great they could work after three o'clock when school was finished for the day.

They had one party. It was Jody's birthday. When George and Stacey returned Dan showed them a couple pictures as George shuffled through a stack of his own.

The entire living room became covered with vacation pictures. Pictures of George in his different styles of clothing. Pictures of the place they stayed at, their room and day excursions. A picture of their rental car and even one of Stacey in a swimsuit, she never lets anyone take any pictures of herself in a swimsuit.

The cafe was quieter than usual during the time Stacey was gone with George. Everyone who had anything to do with the place looked happier the day after she returned.

George's business had piled up on the floor under the mail slot in his office's front door. He was envious of the postman when he saw the mess upon reopening. It felt good to get away

from it all for a while but now it was back to reality.

The guys would be spending their few weeks left of summer buckling down for the next school season and everyone found themselves back together at the cafe again. Nobody had heard much about George and Stacey's travels until the day everyone was sitting at the large table after cleaning the catering vehicle.

It seemed as if the summer mess everyone got into was squared away, they were relaxing and talking about things again. A conversation began about what the funniest thing that happened last year was and Dan being the smart person he is said, "It must have been choosing the best man for George and Stacey's marriage ceremony." Hearing that laughter practically never ended. George remembered that they had to dig through many offers and met a few really silly people trying to chose the "right" best man. Erick started laughing again when Dan said "somebody should offer a high-tech best man service," and after that people were laughing in the cafe who didn't even know what they were laughing about.

The town had a much cleaner appearance today than it had before they left on the honeymoon. It could have been that George's new home looked so perfect or maybe all the high school students needed to make an extra buck. Whatever the reason Dan was lucky his mom was staying at George's for the week because he hadn't up kept her yard completely.

After all the talking Stacey was going back to the cafe early because the major weekend preparations needed to be completed before the morning shift. It was taking her a few days to settle back into her usual routine again but quickly she got Liz her waitress job and a uniform to begin her training. On the most part Stacey was glad to be back at work.

At home Dan had to complete the housework first thing in the morning. It was unusual not to hear from Liz by lunchtime and a few of his other friends came by conveniently, to keep up with the yard work would be tough for one person.

Because she had been with George almost every day during the boys summer and was so happy about her son's achievements at the Hargrove Maintenance Company Stacey wanted to take them to a barbecue picnic she planned one day at George's. Upon returning from his home Stacey walks through the front door and tells Dan to wake up his sleepy head and get his friends to straighten up the living room. As she tells them about the details they express great interest in her plans and when George arrives she plans to leave. The park for the barbecue pick-nick is about twenty

miles down highway eight in the mountains north of Weberston. Stacey has sandwiches, drinks, meat and salad for lunch in a picnic basket.

The highway stretches out across a field of wild grasses and flowers. There are trees growing abundantly along the drive. Mountains and a small creek with a little water and rocks come into view. Before reaching the park the road crosses a couple old bridges and it is beautiful. It takes them about an hour to arrive there.

Barbecue grills are next to a lake in the picnic area. It doesn't take long before Dan has theirs heated up and it's ready to cook. Throwing a large chunk of steak on the grill it becomes steamy and seared immediately. Dan is a good cook. He has worked at the cafe with his mom on busy weekends and holidays cooking hamburgers and working on the grill. He cooked and did prep work too. Stacey has a hot dog. George and Dan have hamburgers. Clay waits on a steak with Bill. Everyone has a salad and a soda while they wait for their food.

After lunch they organize for Frisbee football. The field near the ranger's cabin is good for sports. Lots of people have used the same spot to play net games. Dan and Bill are the leaders. Everyone falls in behind them to make even teams. They begin with a soft game but it gets really competitive. Liz stands at the side because she doesn't want to ruin her good tights and thermal-style shirt. After playing for an hour the score is twenty to twelve.

George and Stacey haven't had much time to be with the group of students during summer partly because of their spending time together and their honeymoon and because they have been doing their daily activities, many that take a lot of their time. She feels that her son Dan needed some extra attention before summer is over and she doesn't want him to think she is only interested in her own affairs. From the picnic bench as she applauds them and watches George, she is surprised at his ability to cheer on the guys throughout their game, it puts a smile on her face. At the point their all yelling and screaming it really looks fun and Liz is tempted to join in too. As she talks to George and Stacey she becomes flaccid as the game comes to an end.

Mike banged his knee so instead of playing another game they decide to take a hike. The trail starts nearby and winds through the forest four miles returning to the parking lot across from where it started. They stopped, rested and looked at wild life along the way. It took them two hours to hike the nature filled trail the park is known for.

Packing the vehicle and heading home before it gets too hot is a must. On the way back to the picnic area everyone had been following the couple, George and Stacey, they couldn't keep from noticing what a wonderful couple they are. Because their relationship was so nice it looked like nothing would ever disturb them. They expressed hope gracefully to each other that it would always be that way for onlookers, not only for them but for George and Stacey too. The students admired them from the rear of the station wagon as they took the front seats and headed towards town. Even Nubby was an interested spectator.

They arrive in town without delays. Dan and George compliment Stacey for her planning of the day. Their summer vacation is coming to an end.

Returning home Dan gets out at the old oak tree to go to Liz's. They start walking through the field and arrive quickly. Her mom invites him to have some iced tea. Sunday she takes it easy at home.

The next day as Stacey returned home in the afternoon Dan and Bill were sitting on the rock, as they always do, listening to the radio. They feel good because there hasn't been any schoolwork to do. Dan fixes to mow the lawn. It has been almost a month and it's over grown. Bill watches her coming up the driveway. She walks outside and the boys are not up to anything except basking on a hot rock, the evening shade quickly falling. He goes to the garage and finds the mower to finish before it gets late. Bill's radio playing a tune can be heard by her. "Would you like a ride home?" she asks politely.

THE END

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