

THE DEVIL'S HORSESHOE

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THE DEVIL'S HORSESHOE

GARY A. BEST

ALSO BY GARY A. BEST

Kill Hitler

Tink's Tank

*Silent Invaders:
Combat Gliders of the Second World War*

*Belle of the Brawl:
Letters Home From a B-17 Bombardier*

and

*Individuals With Physical Disabilities:
An Introduction for Educators*

For my dad, who grew up in the San Joaquin Valley and served in the CBI in WW II, 1944-1945.

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Four...pieces of equipment that most senior officers came to regard as among the most vital to our success in Africa and Europe were the bulldozer, the jeep, the 2½ ton truck and the C-47 airplane.

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER
CRUSADE IN EUROPE

CHAPTER 1

EVENTS: A KISS

THEY HAD PLAYED together when they were babies. They had fought with one another when they were children. They caught the measles at the same time, and they had smoked their first cigarettes together at the back of the barn, where they also threw up together when they had tried to inhale the strong smoke from the two Lucky Strikes Cameron Proctor had swiped from his father's pack. They were best friends and except for the brown skin of Ramon Ramirez's Mexican heritage and the white skin of Cameron, they might have been brothers. And, they believed that they were brothers, blood brothers—the result of each making a small cut with a pocket knife on the end of the index finger of their right hands and letting the blood of each mix and mingle, a ritual they had read about in a dime novel about cowboys and Indians in the Wild West.

Michael and Virginia Proctor purchased the three hundred fifty acres of cotton farmland in the San Joaquin Valley in 1918; their ability to make the purchase a result of a small bequest from Virginia's uncle who had died in the trenches of France during WW I. They had both been born and raised in the valley and had been married just a year when they received the news of their fortune.

“Honey, farmers are always in debt and I can't offer you anything more than that. But if we manage things right, we have good yields on our crops, and Mother Nature is good to us, we should have a happy life together.”

Virginia had accused him of *sweet talkin'* her. But, he was so earnest in sharing with her this line of optimism about the future one moonlit night on a wagon ride out in the country, that she insisted that it was something that no girl could ever resist—a life time of debt and uncertainty. They were young and ambitious and could make a down payment of twenty-five percent on the mortgage for the cotton farm that became known as the Jamieson Farm, the property named as a tribute to her uncle.

A month after they moved in, Mike hired Caesar Ramirez to work with him as the farm's foreman, and a month after that, his wife and Virginia Proctor discovered that they were both pregnant. The homes of the two families were separated by a stand of four Valley Oak trees surrounded by grass that flowed to the edges of the two homes on the property, the larger one with three bedrooms and two bathrooms, the Proctor's residence, and the smaller two bedroom, one bathroom home reserved for the farm's foreman and his family.

The few permanent residents of Mexican descent of the nearby town Prentiss consisted of trades people and artisans, their homes close together forming an enclave where Spanish and English phrases were often used together. Castro's Mercado catered to this special clientele offering the raw ingredients for their favored dinners of a mixture of rice, frijoles, tortillas, fruits from the fields, chicken or pork. That there was a divide in town that separated its Mexican population from the rest of town's residents, most of whom were white, was obvious. And, although the children with last names of Gutierrez, Delgado, and Reyes attended the town's elementary and high schools with children whose last names could be traced back to European ancestry, there was little social intermingling between the two groups. So, while there was a social gulf that separated the Mexican population and the rest of the town's inhabitants, there were also a few bridges that spanned the racial and cultural space between the two groups; most in evidence in church congregations and in the attendance records of the schools.

The Jamieson Farm was the sole exception to the divide of peoples experienced in the rest of town. The three white people and the three

brown people who lived on the farm at the edge of the cotton fields lived side by side in complete disregard to the differences others chose to acknowledge. The two families shared the common characteristic of being color blind. It was a mystery to both the white and brown people of town how this could be and it was just as much a mystery to the Proctors and the Ramirezes why it wasn't so beyond the borders of the farm.

When the boys started using the nicknames they had chosen for one another was lost in memory. The words popped out of their mouths without thought and of greater importance without malice. In very private discussions between the two boys, Ramon was often referred to as *Mex* by his best friend Cameron, who carried with him a nickname in return, *Gringo*. *Mex and Gringo*, *Gringo and Mex*. Had anyone other than these two boys used these words to describe the two friends, there would have been trouble ending with a fight if the speaker didn't, "Take that back or I'll beat the crap out of you."



Two events in the fall of 1938 changed the direction Cameron Proctor's life would take—he kissed Essy on the front porch of her parents' house after walking her home from the Harvest Moon Dance at the Prentiss High School gym, and he learned about airplane engines from his auto shop teacher at school.

About the first event—they had known one another from the time they were both toddlers and with the same ease as they had come to know the rest of the children in the farming community of Prentiss, California, a town little different from the dozens of farm communities and towns scattered throughout the great central valley of the state, the San Joaquin. The parameters of the valley were well defined. The north end extended to the San Joaquin River delta and the capitol at Sacramento, the Tehachapi mountains a few miles from Bakersfield anchoring the southern border. To the east, the shimmering Sierra Nevada, elegant in winter with caps of snow that would, in time, feed the rivers and streams of the valley; to the west lay the more subtle rounded tops of the coastal ranges.

The soil was tillable loam, and water, when managed through the canals and irrigation ditch systems that laced through acres of farmlands, combined with cool and rainy winters and hot and dry summers, created in the valley farm products that fed and clothed the state and the nation. One farmer of the region who had been interviewed by a writer from a travel guide expressed the belief held by many San Joaquin Valley farmers: “Even city slickers could plant a garden in the valley and it would grow.”

Row upon row of grapes, potatoes, carrots, cotton, rice, and fruit trees and citrus groves could be seen between the rural dirt roads that criss-crossed the valley floor ending at the state highways that spread out east-west like ribs from the highway spine of the valley that was U.S. Highway 99.

The towns had names that might be recognized by other residents of the great valley but by few others in the state: Shafter, Bakersfield, Visalia, Fresno, Firebaugh, the three *Ms*, Madera, Merced, and Modesto, Coalinga, Fowler, Clovis, Earlimart. They were similar as all farm towns are similar and different in ways that reflected the cultural and racial spread of settlers attracted to the potential of the valley.

In addition to the predominance of white farm owners or ranch managers of large agriculture-based companies, and the Mexicans, Filipinos, Chinese, Portuguese, Swedes, Basques and a host of others who brought their own languages and traditions to the valley, the 1930s saw an influx of a different type of people — escapees; escapees from the dust ravaged and drought burdened mid-section of the country. They were poor, often without a clear direction to guide them into the future, and labels of them adhered like sticky cotton after a late August rain. *Okies*. *Arkies*. The words became more than identifiers of where they had come from, they established a state of mind for those who once were independent and self-sufficient and now had fallen on hard times and needed work, and if all else failed, both a hand and a handout.



As children they played tag, hide and seek and all the other games children learn to play who live in the country. Esmeralda Benitez was just a month younger than Cameron Proctor and the two of them, along with Cam's best friend and Essy's cousin, Ramon Ramirez, seemed to do everything together. Ramon and Cam refused to play dolls or dress up and pretend house, so Essy learned to play baseball, football and other *boy* games. Essy's sister, two years older and always more mature than the younger of the two Benitez girls, couldn't be bothered with including her *little sister* in the activities that kept the older girls of Prentiss occupied.

The bond between the three had been sealed a few years earlier during the bloody strike of the cotton pickers and the owners and managers of the cotton farms of the area. Their families were in the middle of the conflict between the migratory workers who moved from south to the north in the great valley as crops ripened and those who had the responsibility to return a profit on the investments that the crops represented.

What separated the Proctor operations from the other farmer-owners was its sympathy with the workers and the secretive and dangerous gamble they took in supporting the laborers. Mike Proctor had had six out-houses erected at the encampment area for the migrant workers and their families. It seemed to him a much better arrangement than pickers using open trenches for toileting as was the case in a good number of other farms.

While the senior Proctor and senior Ramirez, from all outward appearances and actions supported the farm owners and managers, it was these same two men who put their families in direct danger of the militant conflict had they been found out. Ramon's father, shoulder to shoulder with Cameron's dad, brought in a water line that led from the main line that fed the houses of the Proctor and Ramirez homes to the migrant pickers' encampment area, each of six spigots placed at intervals of twenty feet hidden among a pile of rocks. This rebellious feat was accomplished between midnight and two o'clock in the morning over a two night period. Had the two of them been found out by others less sympathetic to the workers they would have faced ostracism from the other growers

and possible physical harm, for vigilante retaliations and excursions into the countryside to “teach them bastards a lesson” for aiding the enemy or sympathizing with the union agitators and Communists leading the strike, were not uncommon.

Cam, Ramon and Essy were children at the time of the strike, the three twelve year olds caught in the middle of what they saw as a war between the haves and the have-nots. They had heard the stories of children of the migratory workers going without food and fresh water and talked between themselves what it would be like for them to suffer the same kind of deprivation. It wasn't the kids' fault that the farmers said they couldn't pay more to the pickers, and it wasn't the kids' fault that the adult pickers wanted more money. After all, picking two hundred pounds of cotton a day for sixty cents per hundred pounds was not a lot of money, and they knew it.

Essy had an idea that she spoke to the boys about and it appealed to their wanting to help the *poor kids* and offered a sense of daring and adventure that appealed to the twelve year old boys. They approached their parents with the plan of leaving collected food boxes in designated places on the grounds of two of Prentiss' churches two nights a week, Tuesdays and Saturdays. The following week, two different churches would be identified as the hiding places for the cache of food. Mrs. Proctor, Mrs. Ramirez, and Essy's mother, Mrs. Benitez, the three children and Essy's older sister, would pack the boxes of food collected from like minded people of the community for distribution by their husbands late at night to their hiding places on the church grounds. The adult men would meet at the Benitez house in town at midnight and armed with shotguns for self protection, stash the boxes of food, and later spread the word among the strikers about the location of the food and the nights it would be available. The children wanted to go with their fathers on the midnight food delivery rounds but were not allowed outside the Benitez house where they stayed with their mothers.

For three weeks that fall the pickers of the great central valley continued to strike the farms and ranches and attend rallies to proclaim their

demand for a fair wage and union representation. The farmers for their part continued to hold fast to their position of being unable to pay a higher wage, meet their expenses and turn a profit for their efforts. Nor, would they consent to the establishment of a farm labor union to represent and speak for the pickers. And through it all, the town of Prentiss escaped the rallies and the violence experienced by other farming towns in the valley during this time of labor unrest and did so without any one noticing, until the strike was over that the Proctor operation had no workers picketing its fields, nor were there any labor rallies in or near the town, or vigilante groups roaming through the migratory workers camps within a five mile radius of Prentiss.

When a settlement was reached and the pickers went back to the fields, the Proctor, Ramirez and Benitez children had one problem: They had to keep the secret about what they knew about the food boxes and the water line to the workers' camp. Sometimes it is very difficult for twelve year old children to keep a secret, but on this occasion, the secret was what bound them fast, more so than the actual participation in the food box rescue of the *poor kids*.



Cam had asked to drive his dad's truck the mile into town for the annual autumn dance at the high school. On school days he either walked into town or rode a bicycle; but, tonight was different — he didn't want to get his clothes and shoes dusty walking to town on the dirt road that connected his home on the cotton farm and the paved highway that lead into town.

Cam and Essy had not gone out on a *date* before and he had been unsure about asking her to go to the dance with him. But the Harvest Moon Dance was special — it was their senior year and they wouldn't be able to attend the annual dance ever again. Like many of the other boys at school, he had gone to other school dances *stag*. But tonight was different, they were seniors.

For some time he had noticed that Essy had somehow changed, maybe even grown up.

“Geez, she’s got boobs,” he exclaimed to Ramon. “When did that happen?”

“Gringo, you’re one dumb-ass farmer boy, you know that.”

“And you’re not?”

“Oh hell, I *know* I am. That’s the difference between the two of us. You haven’t got used to the fact that Essy’s a pretty girl and you’re nothing but a...”

“A what?”

“A dumb-ass farmer boy like me. Why she ever agreed to go to the dance with you is beyond me. I thought she had better taste than to be seen at a dance with the likes of you.”

“Up yours, Mex!”

Cam was pretty proud of himself for having asked Essy to go with him to the dance and surprised as hell when she accepted. When she came to the front door of her home when he came by to pick her up he was thunderstruck by how she looked. Her black shoulder length hair had the shine of a thousand brush strokes, her dress, borrowed from her sister, hugged her body in all the right places. There was nothing profound or grown-up about how he greeted her.

“Wow, you look great. I mean, you always look nice, but tonight you look great, you look...” and here he stumbled for words.

Essy knew him better than he knew himself and couldn’t just let him stand there helpless and not knowing what to say.

“Thank you. Gee, you got your dad’s truck tonight. How did you manage that?”

“Oh, oh, well I told him about not wanting to get my shoes dirty walking into town and so, here I am.”

“Cam, it’s such a nice night, let’s walk to the dance, it’s not that far.”

“Oh, you don’t want to go to the dance in a truck.”

“No, you knuckle-head. You seem to have forgotten that I’ve ridden all over this county in that truck with you and Ramon hot-rodding down the road like you had a new Ford coupe. It’s just that, it’s such a nice night I thought it would be nice to walk to the dance.”

“Well, okay.”

On the way to the school gymnasium, he reached over and took Essy’s hand without asking her. He had never done that before, walk hand-in-hand with her, but then he had never gone out with Essy before.

They had had a good time at the dance and Cam was pleased with himself that Essy was *his date* and the guys who came *stag* asked first him and then Essy if they could have a dance with her.

“So, this is what it’s like to have a date with a pretty girl. I kinda like this.”

There was a chill in the air on the way home after the last dance and Essy moved closer to Cam as they walked hand-in-hand. Someone had left the porch light on and when they got to the front door, she opened it just a crack, reached around the corner and turned the light switch off. She turned to Cam and asked, “Would you like to sit on the porch swing for a bit?”

“Sure, I was hoping that you’d want to.”

“Cam, what are you going to do after graduation in June?”

“I don’t know. I guess I haven’t given it a lot of thought. I’d like to go to college up at Fresno, or do something other than living on a cotton farm. What are you going to do?”

“I’ll stay here in Prentiss, I guess. My dad could use the help with his welding business and I can work iron just about as good as he can, even if I am a girl, as he likes to remind me. I think that I’ll start keeping his books for him because he never seems to get everything recorded like he should and he doesn’t have any sense at all when it comes to written contracts and things like that.”

They continued to talk about the future until there was an awkward pause in the conversation when neither of them could add anything to what they were talking about.

“Essy, I’m not very good at this, and I guess I should ask first, but can I kiss you?”

She wondered how long it would take for him to get around to kissing her but she wasn’t prepared for him to ask permission first.

“Yes, I think that I’d like that.”

They leaned in together and their lips touched, their eyes closed, at least Essy’s did for a moment, and then they popped back open again.

It wasn’t right. She should feel something, feel kind of *oogly* and she knew from the movies that girls always closed their eyes when they kissed. She didn’t push away, but put both of her hands on Cam’s arms to gain a little distance and to break the none-to-successful kiss.

Cam was the first to speak. If she was feeling uncomfortable with the kiss, the discomfort was transferred to him without a word.

“What’s the matter? Did I do it wrong?”

“No, Cam, no. You did it just fine. It’s just that...”

“It’s just what?”

“Well, I didn’t feel anything,” Essy tried to explain.

“Didn’t I press hard enough. I can try again. I’d like to try again.”

“No, you pressed hard enough. I meant, I didn’t feel very, oh you know, *oogly, squishy, not very romantic.*”

“I can do better, I know I can” and, with that he leaned in for his second kiss of the evening, this time running his tongue across his lips before pressing them a little harder than before on hers.

She didn’t resist his advance and tried to kiss him back in a way that would make them both feel like they might have accomplished something approaching that *oogly, squishy, romantic* feeling she had missed the first time around.

Her eyes came open again and this time she did push away from him; she didn’t shove or push hard, but she did initiate the physical separation that ended the kiss.

“Cam, I don’t think that we were ever meant to be *boy-friend and girl-friend* and to kiss like boy-friends and girl-friends do. We’re friends, real close friends. I think that you’re the closest friend I’ve ever had, except for Yolanda. Cam, you’re like my brother, or what I think a big brother would be like if I had one.”

“Oh, it was that bad, huh?”

“It wasn’t bad, goofy. It just wasn’t what we’re about. I don’t think brothers and sisters are supposed to kiss like lovers.”

“Oh. Can we still be friends? I wouldn’t like it much if we weren’t friends. You and Ramon are my best friends. I guess I see what you mean. I couldn’t kiss Ramon and get all *oogly and squishy* with him either.”

Essy sat against the back slats of the porch swing and started to giggle; the sort of giggle that is infectious and spreads to anyone within hearing range.

Cam too started to laugh and there was a third sound of laughter titling from behind the front door. Essy tried to control herself, without much success, and whispered to Cam, “That buttinski sister of mine has been hiding behind the front door,” and just a little louder, “I’ll beat the crap out of her for poking her nose and ears into places they don’t belong.”

The laughter from inside the house stopped and the sounds of footsteps faded away down the hallway to where the two Benitez girls shared a bedroom.

“I’d better be going now. It sounds like you’ve got some sister-pound-ing to do.

Essy, can I...”

“Cam, hug me and then kiss me — and we both know what kind of hug and kiss it is, the kind you can have from me at any time and for the rest of our lives.”

As he started to take the single step from the porch to the walkway leading to his dad’s truck parked at the curb, he turned to his friend, his girl friend, “Essy, can I ask a favor of you, please?”

“Of course, what would you like?”

“Don’t tell Ramon about tonight, please. Can this be just between us?”

“Cam, *kiss and tell* is very impolite and rude. What we talk about when we’re together like we are tonight is for no one’s ears but ours.”

Driving the truck back down the dirt road toward home, he thought about the evening, with more thought about what had happened on the porch than what had happened at the dance.

“Well, it’s not what I thought would happen, or what I hoped would happen, whatever that might have been. But, I think maybe everything turned out okay, maybe even better than okay.”

CHAPTER 2

EVENTS: A SPARK PLUG

ABOUT the second event —

“It’s got to be a spark plug, Mr. Cavendish.”

“Why do you think so, Mr. Ramirez?”

“Well, Sir, it sounds pretty much like that Studebaker engine we worked on in auto shop. It coughs and sputters like it’s not firing on all cylinders.”

“Mr. Proctor, Mr. Kurtzheimer, what do you think?”

Cam answered first. “I think that Ramon, err, Mr. Ramirez, is right. If all the cylinders of that V-8 were firing like they’re supposed to, it wouldn’t be coughing like it does.”

Johnny (Johann) Kurtzheimer nodded in agreement.

The three boys, Cameron Proctor, Ramon Ramirez, and Johnny Kurtzheimer were the only ones to accept the invitation of the auto shop teacher to learn about airplane engines in a class he held once a year in the fall for members of the senior class. The class met at Mr. Cavendish’s small ranch house south of town.

Next to the house, about a hundred yards away, the tractor barn that had been on the property when he bought it ten years earlier had been converted to a make shift airplane hanger. One of the long sides of the barn had been opened almost to its full width and height. He couldn’t put the entire airplane into the hanger barn, but he could put the front part that housed the engine in so that most of it was covered by the roof.

Within a week of taking the job as the auto shop teacher at Prentiss High School and moving into the property, he had contracted with a local

farmer to clear a half mile long dirt runway and taxi area that would lead to the open side of the soon to be converted tractor barn. A month later, the crates containing the new Army surplus Curtiss *Jenny* biplane from the Great War arrived by train and a month after that, he married Prudence (Pru) Nicholson Cavendish.

World War I had provided adventure and opportunity for the nineteen year old Stephen Cavendish to see the world and as he volunteered for the flying service, the Lafayette Flying Corps, to see it from the cockpit of an airplane. His dream of becoming a war-time aviator and fight for the honor and glory of France was ended with a near fatal crash during his second solo flight in a *Jenny* trainer. Although he survived, the crash cost him his left leg, but it did not cost him his desire to fly.

With an artificial leg and mustering out pay, he moved to California where he applied for the job of the auto shop teacher in the rural community of Prentiss, population 5,219. The money he had saved from his service in the military and a good sum from a brief stint as a wing-walker with a barn-storming group making the rounds of county fairs, "Come See the Peg-Leg Flier and his Dare Devil Wing Walk," was enough for the move west, and the less dangerous and less rigorous career as a high school teacher. He had promised his sweetheart that he would quit wing walking when he had enough money put aside to buy his own plane and fly just for the pleasure of it. He couldn't give up flying altogether. He wouldn't give up flying altogether.

Prudence gave in, agreeing to move to California with him when he could provide for her a house and a permanent job without the crazy risks he took walking wings for the folks below, all hoping to be there when "the nut with one leg falls off the wing and smashes into the ground below."

Ten years later, childless, the Cavendishes had begun to see Stephen's students as those they had not been able to raise themselves. Pru always brought chilled lemonade to the tractor barn/hanger for the teacher and the students who showed up in the fall for his free class on airplane mechanics and basic aeronautics. At the end of the class each student was

taken up by Mr. Cavendish and given the opportunity to fly the *Jenny* from the front seat, while the instructor's hands, one good leg and one made of wood, were not ever far from the controls.

When students signed up to take auto shop from Mr. Cavendish during their sophomore year of high school they were put off by his insistence on using the title, *Mr.* every time they addressed not only the teacher, but each other. It was expected that they would address the teacher as Mr. Cavendish, but it was another thing to call a classmate you played football with, *Mr. Smith* instead of his given name, *Pete* or by his nickname, *Tractor*.

On the first day of class after he had taken roll, he explained, "You will not only call me Mr. Cavendish, but you will call each of your classmates by the same title: It will be Mr. Smith, not Pete, Peter, or Tractor. Mister, is not only a title, it is a sign of respect to your fellow student. You must respect the person you work with, and in this class, that person's mechanical ability, and you must always respect the machine or motor you are working with. Failure to do so may someday cost you your life or limb or the life of someone else."

After that first class the boys always got together to speculate if that speech about respect and the *Mister* business had anything to do with his artificial leg. It was a mystery that persisted for as long as Stephen Cavendish taught at Prentiss High School.

Most boys signed up for Auto Shop I in their sophomore year but did not enroll for Auto Shop II in their junior year or Auto Shop III as seniors. The number of students who lasted through two years of calling their classmates *Mister* dwindled by the senior year of high school, with enrollment in Auto Shop III never exceeding more than eight. That was a small number to keep the class open for students but the principal and school board agreed that those students who graduated and had completed three years of Stephen Cavendish's auto shop could find a job almost anywhere, something that was very important as the country struggled to work its way through the Great Depression.

It wasn't until 1936 that Mr. Cavendish began offering his free Saturday classes on airplane mechanics to those seniors who might be interested.

The classes lasted from nine in the morning until noon and it gave the teacher something to fill his weekend days. He wasn't a gardener nor did he have hobbies to fill his idle hours. His passion was teaching and flying; why then not combine the two and share that passion with the young men of his auto mechanics class.

He was disappointed when no more than two students came to his barn/hanger for fall Saturday classes each of the first three years they were offered. But as he had insisted upon in his auto shop classes, he respected those who came, and respected the decision of those who did not. Many of those students who didn't come to the Saturday classes had shown some interest but the need to find part-time work to supplement a family's income during the hard-times of the 1930s was more important than "wasting your time learning about something you'll never use."

Mex, Gringo, and Johnny, Mr. Ramirez, Mr. Proctor, and Mr. Kurtzheimer, were like little boys who had a big toy to play with on Saturday mornings. They paid close attention to everything Mr. Cavendish said, read and reread the service manuals that had come with the *Jenny* when it was delivered in crates years ago, and they realized something else — they were having fun. They were learning a level of respect for one another that other young men their age didn't seem to have, and the thought of flying with Mr. Cavendish at the end of the course kept their attendance to the Saturday classes unbroken for the entire fall. If someone had a cold or a runny nose, he still attended the Saturday class. One time Johnny Kurtzheimer fell off the porch of St. Vincent's on Sunday and broke the little finger and ring finger of his right hand. He showed up on Saturday with his hand bandaged, with Mrs. Cavendish fussing over him, questioning whether or not he should be working on the oil lines, engine hoist, and other equipment in the barn/hanger.

As the boys walked back to town after a session with Mr. Cavendish in the fall of 1938, Ramon said to the other two, "I think I'd like to learn to fly like the crop dusters. I'm pretty sure they fly Jennies just like the one that Mr. Cavendish has. Well, they might be a little different, but I bet I could fly one if someone like Mr. Cavendish would teach me how."

The other two boys stopped in their tracks on the side of the dirt road as their friend continued talking and showing with his hands how the crop dusters flew low and slow, back and forth, making sharp turns and fast descents to fly with the wheels of their planes just above the surface of the crops. He was oblivious to the fact that he was talking to no one but himself.

Cam turned to Johnny and said, "You take his legs and I'll tackle him around his shoulders. Ready? Let's go."

It was a matter of seconds and a few running steps before the Cameron-Johnny tackling team caught up to their friend and had flattened him to the dusty road. Ramon was pinned to the ground, the other two boys straddling his legs and arms, his best friend, Gringo, laughing at him, "What makes you think that you're going to do that alone, MR. RAMIREZ?"

"God damn it, Kurtzheimer, get off me."

"That's Mr. Kurtzheimer to you."

The three boys got up off the road, dusted themselves off and continued into town, talking about the merits of flying with Mr. Cavendish and learning to fly crop dusters.

Mr. Proctor asked his two friends, "You guys got a dime?"

"Yah, why?"

"Let's stop by the Creamery and get a milk shake."

As the boys sat on the counter stools in the Creamery, one strawberry and two chocolate milk shakes disappeared by inches with the draw on the straw in each glass. Cam turned to his two friends, "Do you think that Mr. Cavendish put that bad spark plug in the *Jenny's* engine on purpose to see if we could find out why it was running so rough or was it a plug that had gone bad?"