

CYCLOTRON FACTOR



J W KELLEY

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By

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Jacksonville, FL

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International Standard Book Number 13: 978-1-60452-022-4
International Standard Book Number 10: 1-60452-022-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2008943451

BluewaterPress LLC
2220 CR 210 W Ste 108 #132
Jacksonville, FL 32559
<http://bluewaterpress.com>

This book may be purchased online at -

<http://www.bluewaterpress.com/cyclotron>
or through
amazon.com

Prologue

The two anxious boys waited in the knee-high vegetation with only the stars sprinkled in a velvety black sky as light.

"I heard something. Did you hear something?"

"Shhh," whispered the other. "Quiet. It'll hear us!"

A low, cavernous growl reverberated through the thick flora.

A deafening roar broke the stillness of the night, the earth trembled, and something monstrous was after them.

They started to run, but one stumbled, falling flat into a ditch with squiggly crawly things.

Shrieks echoed from the blackened canyon as they plummeted into nothingness.

CHAPTER ONE

Waxahachie, Texas
November 1993

In 1989, construction began on what was planned to be the world's largest high-energy proton particle accelerator, or cyclotron. The superconducting supercollider accelerates opposing charged particle beams, using high-frequency voltage and bending magnetic field to circulate the hydrogen atoms approaching the speed of light. When the elements collide in the fifty-four mile oval ring encircling Waxahachie, Texas, population 18,168, they should be able to see, what is referred to as, the Holy Grail of particles.

The mammoth physics project was to have explored sub-atomic mysteries, space-time continuum, origins of the universe, and conduct extensive nuclear research ultimately benefiting generations upon generations of humanity. Congress, however, pulled the plug on the \$11 billion atom smasher in November of 1993, not long after the complex was completed.

Built deep within the earth, near Waxahachie, sat the collider's monitoring facility complex. The wide Plexiglas

windows in the viewing chamber resembled the Starship Enterprise with vision of Captain Kirk ordering, "Beam me up Scotty."

Inside, Fredrick P. Alexander, PhD, project coordinator, slumped in a chair appearing dejected as a spoiled child, with a heavy belly threatening to overwhelm a weakened belt. The balding, thirty-seven year old Stanford nuclear physicist, graduated Phi Beta Kappa age twenty, and earned a doctorate three years later. He married his college sweetheart, Lois, soon after she completed a Master's degree in world history.

Lois was a slight woman two years older than her husband of fourteen years, but appeared five years younger. Fredrick Alexander thought Lois's most attractive feature was her hair. It was long, silky soft, with a natural deep red, so pure it looked freshly dyed by an alchemical genius, or perhaps nature simply elected to produce the striking shade once in the history of mankind. Lois was not overly active in the local community, instead, elected to teach history at the Waxahachie Junior College.

Dr. Alexander was selected to head the massive particle accelerator project code-named Focus, at its inception in 1988. Their son Paul Jr., or Buddy most folks called him, thought by his proud parents, the true genius of the family.

"People will think you're a geek if you carry that thing around with you all of the time," Paul senior teased, flashing a broad smile of crooked teeth, as he watched his son fiddle with the pocket calculator he always carried in a shirt pocket.

Silent for a moment, responded, "I don't care," as he observed the calculator's miniature screen displaying the answer to a mathematical problem.

The plan for Buddy was to attend Stanford University, both parents' alma mater. His folks had pre-enrolled him, following his early graduation from high school at age 13 in December 1993, with matriculation into Stanford in January, a month after his 14th birthday on December 19.

He resembled your typical young teen-age boy, slight, at one hundred nineteen pounds and five foot six inches tall. A mop of floppy brown hair, matching his eyes, scattered unruly on his head as a slight nose peaked between near prominent cheekbones.

Not a stereotypical geek, however, for he displayed excellent athletic skills, noted by being the leading scorer for the intramural basketball program, thus keeping the egghead comments to a minimum. High school friends often teased him about his high IQ, but when he corrected the mathematics or science teachers, everyone leaned forward as if listening to E. F. Hutton.

"Well," said Dr. Alexander standing and stretching a saggy frame, "let's jump-start this buggy before Uncle Sam sells it to the highest bidder. What do you say?" he asked Buddy, gesturing toward the atom smasher.

"I thought you're supposed to shut it down."

"I am, but it would be a crime not to win one for the Gipper."

"Win one for the what?" He asked, looking puzzled.

"Never mind. I'm going to unleash this beast to see if it can roar, you know, see if it works."

"Won't you get in trouble?"

"Probably, but what are they going to do, fire me?" He grinned and shrugged premature slumping shoulders.

"Do you want me to do anything?"

"Nope, just stay back from the railing, put on the goggles and ear protectors, for it might get a little noisy!" He yelled heading out the door. "Ok?"

"Ok, Dad," he answered stuffing the calculator back into his shirt pocket, grabbing a pair of goggles, and ear protectors from a wall cabinet, and following Paul Senior out of the control room.

Dr. Alexander put on the protection equipment and went over to the large electrical panel housing the master control switch for the cyclotron. The facility guards, stationed within the complex, had been told the Chief Physicist would be working in the cyclotron complex today, but no one comprehended the magnitude of what was about to happen, nor did Fredrick Paul Alexander Jr., nicked name Buddy.

Father and son walked out into the large corridor, as son watched dad throw several switches powering up the main electrical board. "Stay back from the rail," Dr. Alexander ordered his son as he returned to the observation room to access the various computerized readouts.

Dr. Alexander stood directly in front of the complex computer panel, hesitated, took a deep breath, and pressed the large green button in the center. There was a loud metallic clacking sound followed by several lights blinking green as the numerous gauges leapt to life registering the critical atomic activity of the super-conductor. The accelerator immediately kicked in, followed by a quiver within the laboratory and a reverberation far louder than previously expected.

The abundant energy particles collided within the magnetic resonator, triggering multicolored lights to dance about in seizure of frenzy. Buddy wondered if the nuclear elements were designed to turn the various color, and produce the miniature arcs of lightning bolts that snapped on and off with each fifty-four mile revolution of the cyclotron. He forgot his dad's warning and pressed hard against the rail, becoming mesmerized with the amount of electrical activity in the particle charged vacuum. The magical force skipped about in the chamber, as he noticed something unusual glistening on the other side of the vacuum barrier. He pushed forward for a better look, but the intense reverse gravitational field restrained him. However, there was a brief millisecond hiccup in the high-frequency voltage making him lose balance and stumble. It was then the calculator dropped out of his shirt pocket and into the accelerator's magnetic field of charged particles nearing the speed of light. The superconductor supercollider energies warped displaying multiple translucent images as they imploded into the calculator stretching and distorting the fabric of time. The calculator sparked and crackled as the nuclear field morphed into an atomic entity of effervescent lime green.

Instinctively he started to reach for it, but stopped to watch, in morbid fascination. "Oh crap," he said realizing what had happened. "Hope no one saw me drop the calculator," he said to himself, quickly retrieving it, but nearly dropped it again, startled by the heat and vibration it exuded. Rolling it over several times in his hand, decided he better shoved it into his pants pocket before his father could see the calculator's transformation. "Dad will kill me if he finds out what happened," he thought. "I'd better go over and stand by him."

"What a terrible waste," Dr. Alexander said to no one as an intense expression of bitterness spread over his face. He flipped off the master control switch and they left the facility.

"How was your day, you two?" asked Lois Alexander when husband and son entered their home.

"We shut it down today."

Lois nodded her understanding, for she understood his disappointment of losing the job, as well as having to move again. They were all sad about moving again, but maybe for the last time.

"What did you think of the project, Buddy?" asked Lois as she prepared dinner.

"Cool, but noisy."

"What do you mean noisy?" She questioned wiping her hands on an apron.

"We turned it on before the government turned it off. I know I shouldn't have, but wouldn't it be a sad state of affairs not to try it once before it's dismantled," said Paul Alexander with a strange tone of defiance in his voice.

"Are you saying you turned on the supercollider? Does anyone know?"

"The guards were wandering around the facility, but they didn't appear overly concerned."

"Where was Buddy all this time?"

"He was with me. He was ahhh safe," said her husband, looking down at his feet embarrassed.

"And ahhh nothing, Paul, he could have been..."

"Lois, he was fine. Nothing could have happened. Nothing did happen."

"That thing scares me and you know it. No one knows its real capabilities, not even you."

"Well, it won't scare you anymore. The team starts the dismantling process tomorrow. After that, I am out of a job. What did you think, Buddy?" asked Dr. Alexander, playfully messing Buddy's hair.

"It was kinda cool. When do we eat? I'm hungry as a bear."

"In a few minutes," answered Lois Alexander returning to the cooking. "You guys better go wash your hands."

"Ok," they answered in unison.

"It was kinda cool, Dad," said Buddy as they walked together down the hall.

"Yes, it was," replied his father again deep in thought.

"Be sure to wash your face Buddy," called his mom, "you're starting to get some zits."

"Ok, Mom. Zits, what a weird name," pondered Buddy, staring into the bathroom mirror at the young face staring back with the occasional inflamed spot and ever-increasing peach fuzz. "Nobody ever told me I would get zits and hair all over when I got to be a teenager. I haven't even kissed a girl. What girl would ever want to kiss a zit-faced, peach fuzz geek? Will ya still love me, will ya still want me when I'm zitty-four," he sang off-key with a slightly fluctuating tenor, baritone voice.

"Supper!" yelled Mrs. Alexander.

"Coming," answered the two men in her life; one with zits and one without.

The family ate amidst the usual small talk families have around the dinner table, of school, the car's needing brakes, weather and the changing of the season. No one mentioned the supercollider or the fact that Dr. Alexander would be looking for work again.

"Do you have any homework, young man?" Lois asked as he carried the dishes to the sink.

"It's done."

"All of it?"

"Well, most of it."

"Upstairs with you and finish it all," interjected Paul Sr.

"Yes sir."

"We love you," chimed his folks.

"Love you too," he returned racing up the stairs "but will ya still love me with these hairy zits?"

Not in the mood for studying, he reluctantly dug out the schoolbooks hoping the assignments would not take up the whole evening. After finishing the World History project, completing a few questions from the Sociology class, decided to take a well deserved rest.

He pulled the calculator from the blue jeans wondering if it would still work. It glowed an eerie lime-green, felt warm,

and gave off a slight vibration. "The radiance was similar to chemical light sticks," he thought arcing it back and forth over his head watching the tails of color similar to Independence Day sparklers.

Lois Alexander knocked once and entered Buddy's room. "Homework finished?"

"Yeah."

"Good." She kissed him on the forehead, turned and was gone, but yelled back "don't stay up too late."

Buddy looked back at the calculator, which was still tingling in his hand. "It's alive! It's alive!" he joked to himself, remembering the Frankenstein monster movie on late night TV. He pressed a few of the buttons: '- 2 m.'

Lois Alexander knocked once and entered Buddy's room. "Homework finished?"

"Yeah," he grinned, thinking she was playing a trick on him.

"Good." She kissed him on the forehead, turned and was gone, but yelled back "don't stay up too late."

He laughed to himself watching her leave the room, for she always liked to play games with him. Buddy now pressed a few more buttons on the calculator: '- 30 m.'

"Do you have any homework, young man?" asked Buddy's mom from the dinner table as he carried his dishes to the sink.

"It's done."

"All of it?"

"Most of it."

"Upstairs with you and finish it all. And maybe you'd better leave your calculator in your room during dinner," interjected his father.

"Yes sir."

"We love you," chimed his folks.

"Love you too," he returned racing up the stairs, "but will ya still love me with these hairy zits?"

"What the heck is going on around here?" He said to himself looking at the calculator and back at the incomplete homework, and back to the calculator. The homework assignment was finished earlier and now was blank.

Maybe he just thought he had done the assignments, but, but nothing. He knew he had finished his studies earlier. "I

wonder if this is a déjà vu experience? It is weird whatever it is. Could I have been confused about doing my homework? No way! Doing the assignment once is ok, but the second time is not a laughing matter." Well the homework was finished, again.

How could this ordinary calculator become lime green and change time? Perhaps it was the supercollider. "Lucky I didn't fall in there, otherwise I might be lime green and would say 'Take me to your leader, earthling,' he giggled making a contorted face in the mirror.

His thoughts interrupted again when Lois Alexander knocked once and entered Buddy's room. "Homework finished?"

"Yeah?" He answered concerned with all the repetition.

"Good." She kissed him on the forehead, turned and was gone, but she yelled back "don't stay up too late."

This was the third time his mother had entered the room saying and doing the exact same thing. The calculator felt alive as he held it. He decided to perform another experiment by pressing the same calibration he had previously: '- 2 m.'

Lois Alexander knocked once and entered Buddy's room. "Homework finished?"

"Yeah," he answered for the fourth time.

"Good." She kissed him on the forehead, turned and was gone, but yelled back "don't stay up too late."

Buddy pressed the same buttons again: '- 2 m.'

His mother knocked once and entered Buddy's room. "Homework finished?"

"Yeah," he answered for the fifth time.

"Good." She kissed him on the forehead, turned and was gone, but she yelled back "don't stay up too late." for the fifth time.

"I wonder," he said with trembling fingers pressing '+24 h.' Moments blinked past with flashes of tomorrow's sunrise, followed by sunset, flickers of his mother entering, cleaning and leaving the room. While observing these strange phenomena, of being within and without the element of time, he termed it 'timeplex.' Though unsure, where the word had come from, but it seemed adequate to express watching time pass without time passing.

He remembered going to school, coming home, eating dinner, playing outside with Max, his neighborhood friend, and now was back in his room staring at the blinking clock twenty-four hours later. It was as if it had all taken place in a dream. "I'm a day late and probably a dollar short," he mused. On the chair sat his dirty gym clothes from school. He was planning to bring them home, tomorrow, today. How could he experience a day, even remembering what happened without feeling it happen, without leaving his room? He decided upon one last experiment by pressing '- 24 h -2 m.'

Lois Alexander knocked once and entered Buddy's room. "Homework finished?"

"Yeah," he answered for the sixth time.

"Good." She kissed him on the forehead, turned and was gone, but yelled back "don't stay up too late."

Buddy studied the pulsating entity. "The proton accelerator superconducting supercollider magnetic resonance somehow gave the thing a time displacement accelerator decelerator capability," thought Buddy. He hesitated at the thought and shook his head, not believing what he was holding. The natural laws of physics remodeled the calculator into a pocket-rocket time machine, which was sweet, but a little scary in the hands of a thirteen-year-old, well, almost fourteen.

Totally not cool was dad losing the job after dismantling the cyclotron. And not cool at all was the fact they would be moving. No one in the Alexander family was happy about leaving Waxahachie. He liked living here, even though he did not make the varsity basketball team. Most of all, he was going to miss his good friend and next-door neighbor, Max Planck.

CHAPTER TWO

Destination: Colorado Springs
November 1993

Dr. Paul Alexander would have rather gone back to Stanford to teach and continue his research in brillouin light scattering spectroscopy, but living in Palo Alto, on a professor's salary, was out of the question with the explosion of the internet companies in the area. The dot-commers had driven property prices to astronomical heights; therefore, the Alexander family resigned themselves to living and teaching in an upcoming Midwestern community, ultimately deciding on Colorado Springs. The University of Colorado in Boulder was their first choice, but a Stanford colleague was firmly entrenched as Chairperson, Department of Physics, investigating the early fundamental studies of the Bose-Einstein condensation in dilute gases of alkali atoms. Thus, Distinguished Professor Fredrick P. Alexander, PhD, would become Chair, Department of Physics and Energy Science at University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, in January 1994.

Buddy Alexander was scheduled to start college in January and was keeping his fingers crossed he might grow some

more. Mom kept telling him he would get taller, but each week measured, he was the same as before.

Graduating from high school early may sound cool, but in actuality, there are both positives and negatives. For example, many girls smiled at him, but only because they thought he was cute and cuddly, not because of zits and peach fuzz. However, the jocks did not think it cute when their girl friends grinned at the bright kid who should be in grammar school.

Occasionally high school bullies picked on him, but rarely, for whatever the reason, he got along with everyone from jocks, nerds, to FFA and machine shop types. However, most of the girls were much taller and more physically developed. Some of the guys had been shaving for several years and had more leg hair than he had on his head. Sometime he wondered if he would ever have to shave or have leg hair, or did it matter? He did know in relation to stature and masculinity, he was on the low end of the bell-shaped curve, but what do you do when you're nothing but a little squirt.

He remembered when the class loudmouth notified everyone Buddy had the highest IQ recorded in the high school and probably in all of Texas, embarrassing him when everyone turned and stared at the smallest kid in high school with the highest IQ in the state of Texas. Thankfully, that part of his young life was behind him, hopefully, if the college students cut him some slack, regardless of physical stature or IQ.

"I wish Dad could have driven with us," sighed Buddy, rubbing the tears from eyes hoping his mom would not notice. He turned around in the car seat, but could no longer see his father.

"Your dad has a million things to do down under," which was how Paul Sr. always referred to the supercollider complex. "He has to be there during most of the dismantling process and will catch up with us in month or so. By that time, we should be settled in our new home in Colorado Springs."

"I'm gonna miss---"

"Going to miss?" His mother corrected his diction.

"Going to miss Max."

"I know you will sweetheart, but you'll make more friends once we get settled and after you start school."

"No one wants to hang out with a wimpy IQ nerd."

"You're not a nerd, Buddy. You're ahhh gifted."

"Gifted, Right!"

"Get out the map, Mr. Gifted, and we'll plot our trip. This will be fun. We have two weeks to travel and we're going to make the most of it. We'll visit several historical sites along the way and you will love it, just you wait."

"Yeah I can hardly wait."

"Don't be so pessimistic."

"You like history Mom. I don't."

"You should and after this trip maybe you will."

"Let's go to Hawaii and see the Arizona Memorial. Now that would be a fun trip filled with lots of history, plus we would have the ocean to swim in."

"Real funny, Buddy. We can't drive to Hawaii."

"Just trying to help Mom."

"Right! Now get out the map so we can plan our trip. Decide where we should go, someplace within reason, and then decide how many miles we should drive today."

"I just want to stay someplace with a swimming pool."

"Buddy, we will. Now, get out the map."

"Ok. I wish Dad was with us."

"So do I, Buddy."

"It looks like it is about 900 miles to the Springs, if we drove straight through, or 3900 if we go via Hawaii."

Lois shook her head and rolled her eyes in an exaggerated gesture of motherly impatience.

"Ok, Ok, we should take Interstate 35 north to Dallas, then to Oklahoma City, then to Wichita and---"

"Let's just take this trip one step at a time, Ok? Dallas first, which should be interesting. We've always wanted to see where President John F. Kennedy was assassinated."

"You've always wanted to see where he was killed. Dad and I think it's morbid."

"Buddy, it's not morbid. It's history."

"Morbid history, for everybody knows Kennedy was killed in Dallas. Every history teacher in the world requires the poor students to read about the Kennedy assassination and make reports comparing him to Lincoln. Oswald shot Kennedy from a bookstore and ran to a theater; Booth shot Lincoln at a theater

and ran over to a bookstore. Everybody knows this. Let's drive to Hawaii and see the Arizona Memorial."

"Buddy, be serious."

"Sorry."

"And besides," corrected the history teacher mother, "Lee Harvey Oswald shot Kennedy from the sixth floor of the Texas Schoolbook Depository, not a bookstore."

"Whatever. How do you remember that stuff?"

"Don't say 'stuff.'"

"How do you remember history so precisely?" He repeated, exaggerating the enunciation in response to her correction.

"History is precise. I enjoy the exactness of history the same way you and your father enjoy mathematical equations. History makes our life memorable and worthwhile."

"Tell that to some of my classmates."

"Buddy!"

"Sorry."

"So, we drive to Dallas today and---"

"Stay in a motel with a pool?"

"Stay in a motel with a pool, but tomorrow we will go to Dealy Plaza, where the motorcade traveled when the President was killed and we'll visit the museum on the sixth floor of the Book Depository building. Won't that be fun?"

"Yeah, real fun."

"Buddy, be nice."

"I'm just teasing, Mom. It may actually be interesting," he said looking at the handheld calculator vibrating in his hand. "If you're tired, Mom, I can drive for you. Remember, I'm gifted."

"Gifted, right. How could I forget?" said Lois Alexander smiling.

Lois turned on the radio and hummed absent-mindedly to the country western music flowing from nearly every Texas station within range. She didn't mind. After a while, she had gotten use to cowboy music, yawls, and syrupy sweet neighbors. However, she would miss Waxahachie, Texas and Max Planck too, just like Buddy.

Still fooling around with the pocket calculator, he smiled and thought, "This may be more fun than I imagined."

"What day was Kennedy killed?" asked Buddy examining the numbers on the calculator.

"Everybody knows it was November 22nd, 1963. He was riding in a motorcade with his wife, Jacqueline, and Governor and Mrs. John Connally."

"I guess that guy, Oswald---"

"Lee Harvey Oswald."

"Lee Harvey Oswald shot the president."

"Tragically, yes."

"Did he have any help?"

"The Warren Commission believed Oswald was the killer and worked alone."

"What about the big debate over the three shots being impossible to do alone and stuff?"

"Don't say 'stuff.'"

"Sorry. Wonder why he did it?"

"No one knows for sure, but it was theorized Oswald's deep-rooted resentment toward authority, provoked so much hostility it drove him to commit the horrendous crime."

"I remember some of the stuff but---"

"Don't say 'stuff.'"

"I remember some of the assassination history, but not like you."

"I was only six years old when it happened, but it was worldwide news and history in the making, even for a little girl. People loved President Kennedy."

"Wasn't he the first Jewish President?"

"Fredrick Paul!" scolded Mrs. Alexander.

"Just teasing Mom, just teasing. I know he was Catholic," he said grinning. "I'm hungry."

"We'll be there before long sweetheart."

"Pool?"

"Yes a pool," said Lois Alexander laughing. "Gifted but still thirteen," she thought.

They decided to stay in a Holiday Inn just off Interstate 35, advertising a swimming pool. They pulled into the parking lot and Lois got them registered.

"This'll be almost as good as the Arizona Memorial," Buddy giggled sprinting to the door to their room. "Hurry, Mom!"

"I'm hurrying," she said putting the key into the door.

"Here. I'll do it," he said, grabbing the keys and opening the door. "Hurry, let's go swimming," he said, ripping off the t-shirt, dropping it on the floor, searching frantically for his swimsuit.

"I thought you were hungry?"

"I'd rather go swimming and eat later. Is that Ok? Will you swim with me, Mom? Come on, Mom. Go in with me," pleaded Buddy. "We'll go to that Dealy museum and junk tomorrow."

"Don't say 'junk.'"

"Come on Mom."

"Oh, Buddy, ok," she agreed reluctantly, shaking her head and smiling at her son's energy.

"Yahoo," yelled Buddy, stripping off his pants and streaking to the bathroom.

CHAPTER THREE

Dallas, Texas
Dealy Plaza
November 22nd, 1993
11:31 AM

A parking place anywhere near Dealy Plaza was impossible to find, for it was the thirtieth anniversary of the assassination of President Kennedy and every tourist and Dallas local wanted to be in the precise location at the killing hour. Lois and Buddy Alexander reluctantly paid ten dollars to park their car and still ended up walking nearly four blocks to the Plaza.

"I can't believe people would charge ten dollars to park a car," fumed Lois Alexander.

"It's pretty jam-packed around here Mom."

"I know it's crowded, Buddy, but ten dollars to park even in New York City is too much."

"We wouldn't have had to pay anything to park in Hawaii."

"Buddy!"

"Sorry Mom."

Most of the regional politicians were out in force to hobnob with their constituents, as the Mayor and two congressional

representatives scheduled to speak to anyone who would care to listen. Souvenir hawkers nearly outnumbered the tourists, as did the food vendors. The Plaza was full to capacity.

"You be sure to stay where I can see you and if you run off, tell me where you're going. We'll go over to the museum after the speeches."

"Ok, Mom. I think I'm going up on that little hill so I can see a little bit better."

"Ok, just be careful it's getting crowded."

"Yeah Mom."

The grassy knoll was congested too, maybe even more than the lower area of the Plaza. Buddy saw his mom gesture and returned her wave. He slipped out the calculator and punched in '-30 y.' The force of the apparatus' reverse inertia made him dizzy, similar to being on a merry go-round too long, making him stagger and stumble to the ground.

The first strange oddity he noticed was the grass was damp to the touch, rather than blast furnace hot just moments ago. An Asian man, with an unusually heavy umbrella or something, stepped over him scarping his leg and tearing the blue jeans as well, barking, "Get out of the way, kid. What's wrong with you, anyway?" The man glanced down at the small trickle of blood oozing from the leg wound, but did not appear to care as he climbed higher up the knoll.

"Creep," answered Buddy to the man's scowl.

"Can't lie down around here," stated a man in a dark suit, out-of-doors complexion, black earpiece and dark sunglasses. "Come on, get up." He said helping Buddy to his feet. "What did you do to your leg, son?" questioned the man. He apparently received a call on the earpiece, for he fell silent for a moment listening. "Yeah, go ahead. I'm here. Some kid hurt his leg," the man said, speaking into a lapel. "No, nothing here either," he said scanning the area. Returning his attention to Buddy said, "this is a pretty good place to see the President, young fellow, but don't lie down, otherwise someone might step on you."

"The President?" Replied Buddy, astonished with still being dizzy from the time travel as well as a fluttering sensation in his stomach.

"Jesus, kid, why do you think all these people are here? The

Presidential motorcade should be coming by here in another thirty minutes or so. Isn't that why you're here?"

"My mom wanted me to see the museum and stuff," said Buddy, forgetting in all the confusion, he had used the calculator. The pain in the leg was hurting more than he cared to admit.

"No museum around here, kid," stated the Secret Service man.

"Isn't there one on the sixth floor of the bookstore over there?" He asked, pointing across the plaza.

"That building is a book depository. No bookstore or museum. Sorry, kid."

"President Clinton is going to be here?" asked Buddy, rubbing the laceration.

"Who is President Clinton? What's wrong with you, kid? Did you hurt your head too?" questioned the agent. "President and Mrs. Kennedy, Governor and Mrs. Connally will be passing by in just a few more minutes. Gotta go, kid. No more lying down, understand? Otherwise, someone might step on you." Silent as a shadow, the man was gone, blending into the crowd like smoke in a bar.

People were milling around the plaza, many with odd-looking cameras and several with old fashion movie cameras resembling the silent 8mm or 16mm types mom talked about her folks having. "But of course," he thought, "the calculator had again worked its traveling magic. That is why I am so out of it and not thinking clear. It must be from distorting the earth's fabric of space and time during the leap," he figured, remembering the advanced physics class and Einstein's Theory of Relativity. Sometimes it was convenient being intelligent, but not always.

"Excuse me, miss," said Buddy to an elderly woman standing near him, who was probably his mothers age. "What is the date?"

"Is this some type of joke?" She asked sucking in her breath showing obvious sighs of displeasure, sounding like his mom too.

"I'm sorry. My mom, errr mother and I just got off of a plane from overseas and..."

"You're not joking."

"No ma'am I'm not."

"Today is November 22nd," stated the woman matter-of-factly, smiling showing a much friendlier side. "Where did you fly in from?" she asked.

"November 22nd, 1993?" he questioned, still a bit dazed.

"Just what I thought, a smart aleck. Well, it's 1963," she barked her distinctive voice high and scratchy, as her face reddened with obvious contempt toward the young ruffian. "For a moment you had me going. Flew in from overseas, did you? You should be ashamed of yourself."

"1963?" Buddy questioned again, his face blanching white tottering slightly.

"My goodness, young man, what's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost."

Buddy picked up a newspaper from the ground and read the date, "November 22nd, 1963," in bold black print. "It is 1963," he whispered, looking toward the sixth floor of the book depository building. "What time is it, lady?" He quizzed the same woman.

"First you want to know the date and now you want to know the time. Are you doing drugs or something?"

"No. What time is it? Please," He pleaded grabbing her wrist to see the watch.

"Don't you dare touch me or I'll call a policeman," she spat jerking her arm free after seeing several police officers within yelling distance.

"I'm sorry. Your watch says 12:21. Is it correct?"

"It should be. I set it by the radio this morning. Are you expecting---?"

"Thanks, lady," interrupted Buddy fully cognizant of his travel 30 years back in time.

"I wonder if I should try to warn someone. Where did the Secret Service man go? Would I change history? What would happen to the future? Would I still be born? Mom said Johnson kept the US in the Vietnam War and Kennedy would not have. Dad's older brother, Uncle Jimmy, who I did not ever know, was killed in Vietnam. Dad always said he was able to go to Stanford because of Uncle Jimmy's insurance money. What would happen if Dad did not have the money

to go to college? What would have happen if Uncle Jimmy had lived rather than being killed in the war? Would Dad have met Mom? What I become an unknown entity, or would I just go up in a puff of smoke. So many questions hit him all at once making his head and imagination spin like a top.

"What time is it now, lady?" Buddy asked the same woman.

"You're certainly becoming a bother, young man. Do you have some place to be?"

"Please ma'am, the time," he begged.

"12:26," came the exasperated reply.

"Five more minutes, ahhh thank you. I'm sorry to have bothered you."

"What happens in five more minutes?" She asked looking at the watch.

"I ahhh, I ahhh, have to meet my mom," came a stuttered lie.

"You're a strange one. What's your name anyway?"

"Ahhh, Bud...Fredrick."

Buddy glanced behind the grassy knoll toward the railroad yard and noticed three movie-set type tramps wearing tattered heavy over coats, snaggletooth, dirty, and each watching the activity in the plaza. "I wish I could remember what Mom had said about the assassination," he said to himself.

Numerous reporters and camera operators were roaming the area all-trying to get the best perspective to view the presidential motorcade as it drives by.

"What time is it now?" Buddy again asked the woman, who just smirked and raised her wrist.

The growing excitement of the crowd was appearing to crescendo as the people started pushing forward, just as several bystanders pointed up the street. The motorcade gradually came into view slowly turning the corner nearing the end of its route through the heart of the city. Some citizens were taking pictures, while others waved small American flags, some simply jumped up and down yelling and screaming with joy. Many onlookers stood with tears in their eyes as they watched the procession. Buddy could now see President Kennedy sitting in the back of a black Lincoln convertible acknowledging to the multitude by waving his hands. Beside him, in a pink suit was Mrs. Kennedy, also gesturing to the

many citizens. Several police officers on motorcycles were adjacent to the President's car as several Secret Servicemen stood on the running boards of a second black convertible. "A Cadillac," he thought.

At precisely 12:31 PM Buddy eyes darted toward the six floor of the book depository building, the women beside him followed his gaze. He jumped reflexively; as did the woman, when a single powerful shot rang out, reverberating throughout the plaza.

The woman gasped as she covered her mouth with her hand, terrified, as she looked down at Buddy. He might have seen the muzzle blast from the window, but turned just in time to see the President's head jerk about and sag like a rag dolls. Was that blood he saw flying? The woman again copied his line of sight. Buddy heard a clicking noise from behind and spun around just in time another shot was fired off. The woman again followed his lead and turned with him to see the Asian man sprinting toward the rail yard, still carrying the black umbrella thing as he disappeared with the three tramps. The woman again mimicked Buddy's turn just in time for both to hear the horrifying ricochet of the third shot, just as the President jolted backwards and slumped forward. Mrs. Kennedy appeared to panic and started climbing out, but was stopped by a Secret Service agent, who leaped in covering both of them with his body.

The historical moment seemed frozen in time, but pandemonium soon erupted. The women looked toward the motorcade and back to Buddy. "You knew," she mouthed in the noise and confusion.

People began running, shouting and crawling in an attempt to get out of harm's way, as others fell to the ground sobbing hysterically at what they had witnessed. Some observers were yelling and pointing toward the sixth floor window of the book depository building. Secret Service agents and police officers raced toward the door, reporters, newsmen, and cameramen ran after the motorcade but were stopped mid-stride by more policemen and Secret Service agents.

People saw people not seeing and people heard people not hearing. Were you there, they would be asked later?

Bystanders would forever be asking each other the same question as the assassination became a sad part of America's turbulent history. Now he had also been an improbable witness from 1993 observing 1963.

He looked back up the knoll but could not see the Asian man anymore and wondered why the man fled, and how could a sniper in the building across the plaza fire three shots in such rapid sequence. One of the shots appeared to come from behind him, making his ears to ring. Several other bystanders rubbed their ears too, attempting to stop the noise.

The woman who had told him the time came up to him and peered into his face. "You knew," she said, getting closer. "How did you know? You asked if it was 1993. What does the printing on your t-shirt mean?" Buddy glanced at the front of his t-shirt, which read "Apple vs. Microsoft /No contest" in bold letters. "Your shoes say Nike. I have never seen or heard of Nike before and I have two teenage boys. Where do you live and what is the green thing in your pocket? You've been acting strange all afternoon." Said the woman suddenly grabbing Buddy by the shirtsleeve and yelling, "Help, help, police!"

Several people heard the commotion on the knoll and started running up thinking someone had caught one of the shooters.

"Let me go!" screamed Buddy trying to squirm free. "Let me go!" He yelled pulling back with all of his strength, finally breaking away from her grip but ripping his shirtsleeve in the process. "Boy, she was strong for an old woman Mom's age," he thought sprinting up the grassy knoll. Once at the top he looked back just in time to see two policemen talking to the anxious woman who was frantically pointing in his direction. Slipping unnoticed behind a bush, Buddy instantly pressed '+30y' initiating the familiar swirling disorientation, accompanied by a loss of balance sending him falling to his knees. "Déjà vu," he wondered, trying to get his bearings.

Someone again started tugging at his torn sleeve, but he again tried to squirm free as he shouted, "I told you to leave me alone," but immediately stopped when he saw his Mom in front of him.

"Buddy Alexander," she said yanking him to his feet. "Where in the world have you been? I have been worried sick searching all over for you. My God, son, what happened to your shirt? It's ripped and so are your pants. Is that blood? Where have you been? What have you been doing? Fredrick Paul Alexander Jr., this is no way for you to behave at the start of our vacation! If your dad were here you wouldn't be acting like this!"

"I was just watching the motorcade when," Buddy mumbled excitedly, still a bit confused from the passage through time.

"Motorcade? What motorcade?"

CHAPTER FOUR

Heading North
November 23rd, 1993

Lois Alexander had showered, packed her suitcase, and had two cups of coffee as he glanced through the local newspaper, including the local weather, forecasting more rain in some regions of Texas. She decided it was time to wake her son and let him complain about getting up early, but like all teenagers, he could sleep around the clock if you let him, but today they had to make Oklahoma City. In addition, late last night it had rained again, and was a little concerning. In 1991, a slow-moving multicell thunderstorm started one of the heaviest downpours of the century, dropping nearly 17 inches of rain in twenty-four hours. Trinity River pushed past its banks turning parking lots and parks into lakes; and roads became powerful rivers with widespread flooding and many deaths.

When they first moved to Texas, she wondered the significance of the tall white poles with the black marking up to 12 feet. Later they discovered they were the low-level dips in the road for high water marks, showing the driver how deep the rushing water was on the road. Texans called them

seasonal streams, but they could be very deadly. Every year someone would disregard the warning poles and attempt to drive through the water of yesterday's dusty path and today's raging river. It was capable of snatching up a car, dragging it to the deepest location and sinking it.

This was concerning to Lois, therefore it was time to go.

"Why do we have to get up so early, Mom?" questioned Buddy, still trying to rub the sleep from his eyes after seeing it was 6:29 in the morning. "What kind of vacation is it when you can't even sleep late?"

"We have to get started. It rained again last night, and the forecast today is more rain. I would prefer to leave early, miss the Dallas traffic and any more rain coming this way. Besides, we have places to go and things to do. Plus, the traffic in Dallas is the worst when everyone is trying to go to work and maybe we will miss it by starting early."

"I bet if we started late we'd miss some of the traffic too and besides, my leg still hurts. Maybe I should sleep in and give it a rest."

"Buddy, get up, wash your face, and brush your teeth. Now hurry!"

"Oh Mom."

"Oh Mom nothing. Get up and get moving, otherwise I'll leave you."

"Ok."

"Buddy!"

"Ok, Ok, I'm up. But my leg still hurts."

"Buddy!" his mother yelled once more in her no nonsense tone.

"Yes, Mother."

The Alexander's car, a 1992 midnight blue four-door Oldsmobile sedan, was stuffed to overflowing. Paul Sr. and Lois decided to put as much into the car as they could, for the household goods would not be shipped for another month.

"Where am I supposed to put the suitcases?" asked Buddy, trying to push them into the crowded back seat.

"You got them out, you put them back."

"Yeah but..."

"Yeah but nothing, sometimes you're so helpless. What

are you going to do at Stanford next year and I'm not around to wait on you?"

"Call you long distance."

"Funny." She said helping him move things around in the back seat bringing order to the previous chaos, thereby allowing Buddy to slide the cases in easily. All but one.

"See that wasn't so bad. I guess you may have to ride on the hood," joked Lois Alexander, smiling as she put the remaining suitcase in Buddy's seat.

"Mom!"

"Is that better?" she asked in a teasing tone as she moved the piece of luggage to the only open spot in the rear of the automobile. "Get out the map and you direct our journey and not to Hawaii either." She climbed behind the steering wheel as Buddy got settled into the passenger seat.

"Ok, here we go," said Buddy studying the open map on his lap as Mrs. Alexander pulled out into the light traffic of the early morning. "Take Interstate 35 north to---"

"We'll go say hello to your Aunt Jenny, your dad's sister," interrupted his mom.

"I know Aunt Jenny. Why do we have to go see her?"

"Because she's your dad's sister and I promised him we would."

"Oh Mom, do we hafta?"

"Do we have to. Don't talk like a nitwit," said Lois rolling her eyes.

"Do we have to?" emphasized Buddy in exaggerated perfect diction.

"We are just stopping by her work to say hello. She is not expecting us so we will do our thing and leave. You hug her, be polite and your dad will be happy we paid her a visit."

"We hardly even know her."

"That's because she's so much older than your dad.

"Nobody's older than Dad."

"Buddy!" scolded his mother, but smiled at her son's youthful misunderstanding of the world, in spite of a high IQ. Anyone over 19 seemed old to him.

"Sorry."

"Besides, I am older than your dad, by just a little bit."

"Yeah but you look good."

"Good answer, my gifted young teenager."

With the torture of Dallas's congested metro traffic behind them, Lois and Buddy settled in for the long drive, listening to one of the many Texas country and western radio stations. They decided to eat breakfast near Denton, but Buddy's stomach was already starting to growl, reminding him of the snacks in the back seat.

"Want a chip or something?" he asked.

"Can't you wait for breakfast?"

"I guess. If I have to."

"Oh, go ahead if you must, but you're going to turn into the Frito Bandito one of these days." His mother joked laughing lightly as Buddy released the seatbelt, turned around, and started rummaging round for the travel snacks. Finally finding his favorites, everything appeared to be right in the world.

Lois normally was not a fast driver, but today she wanted to make Oklahoma City early therefore, she put the Oldsmobile's cruise control on 70 miles per hour, just a bit over the posted speed limit of 65.

It was a beautiful fall morning, Interstate 35 north was dry, driving condition was perfect and the road straight as far as you could see. There was minimal traffic, except for one lone beat-up old pick-up heading south as they drove north. The November morning was starting to show signs of fall with the cool air even in this arid climate. Lois took her eyes off the road for just a second, turning slightly to watch Buddy get the treat from the back seat. The time on the dash read 8:03.

"That's odd," she thought, seeing the southbound pick-up swerve erratically several times.

The decrepit rust brown pick-up veered again, this time shooting across the centerline of the highway. The dilapidated truck was now headed south on the north bound lane---straight toward them.

"Buddy!" screamed Lois Alexander to her son.

Buddy did not see the truck coming at them, for he was still turned around in the seat clutching a bag of chips. Lois