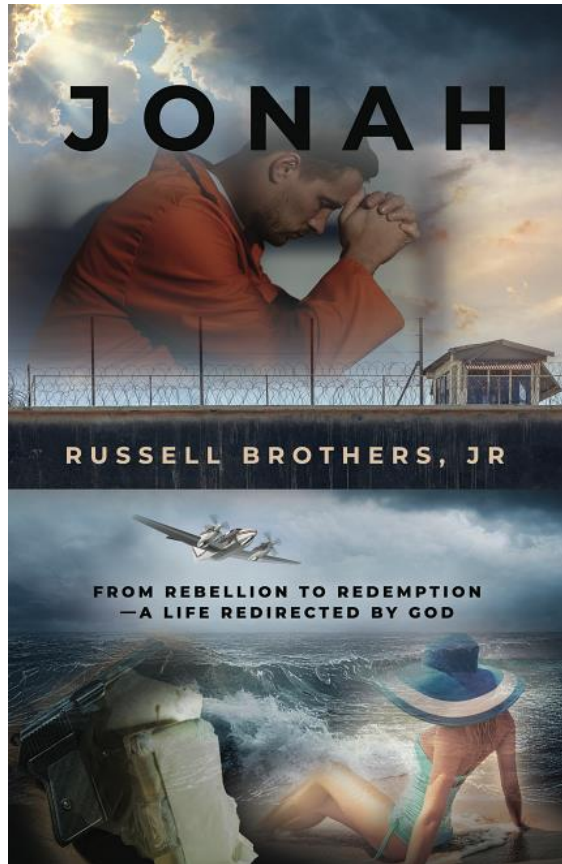




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JONAH



RUSSELL BROTHERS, JR



**FROM REBELLION TO REDEMPTION
—A LIFE REDIRECTED BY GOD**



Jonah

Russell Brothers, Jr.



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Contents

Preface	vii
Chapter One Bahamas, 1981	1
Chapter Two The Belle Meade Unicorn.....	11
Chapter Three Love for Life Outdoors.....	21
Chapter Four Old Time Religion.....	37
Chapter Five Seeing America.....	39
Chapter Six University Life.....	49
Chapter Seven Elbow Grease	53
Chapter Eight Love and Marriage	57
Chapter Nine Learning to Fly.....	65
Chapter Ten Family Travels and Motor Bikes.....	75
Chapter Eleven Flying in the Insurance Business	87
Chapter Twelve A New Plane.....	99
Chapter Thirteen Balancing Time: The Insurance and Coal Businesses.....	111
Chapter Fourteen Transitions	123
Chapter Fifteen Time Changes Nothing	127
Chapter Sixteen Meeting Richard Pitt.....	137
Chapter Seventeen Buying a Lot of Bird Dogs	147
Chapter Eighteen The Belle Meade Smuggler	153
Chapter Nineteen Shifting Gears.....	167
Chapter Twenty Flying from Colombia to the U.S.	183
Chapter Twenty-One First Trip into the US.	197
Chapter Twenty-Two When it Rains, Sometimes it Pours.	205
Chapter Twenty-Three The Last Trip	209
Chapter Twenty-Four Putting Cash to Work in 1987	215

Chapter Twenty-Five Leaving Great Isaacs to Bimini.....	223
Chapter Twenty-Six Florida Indictment	231
Chapter Twenty-Seven The One Negated Charge	239
Chapter Twenty-Eight Guilty as Charged	243
Chapter Twenty-Nine Prison Life	249
Chapter Thirty I Attempted to be Anonymous When Smuggling...267	
Chapter Thirty-One Leaving Florida Prisons	275
Chapter Thirty-Two Life's Phase Three.....	297
Chapter Thirty-Three Giving Back Through Men of Valor	313
Epilogue	323

Chapter One

Bahamas, 1981

The warm waters came out of the south, pushed by the Gulf Stream. My six-foot Hawaiian sling rested solidly in my hand ninety feet down the west side of a coral wall, sloping deeper into the Atlantic's Gulf Stream off Victory Cay, Bahamas. My catch bag contained two Nassau Grouper and three lobsters gotten on the way down. The oxygen gauge pointed to the bottom of the red, and my lungs began to pull hard for air. No place for claustrophobics. Unalarmed, although down three atmospheres, I'd developed a reckless habit over the years of using up all the oxygen at that depth, but so far with no repercussions.

Time to surface. As I ascended slowly, rising with exhaled bubbles, my lungs automatically began to fill, and the tank released more oxygen. Plenty of oxygen remained in the tank as the atmospheric pressure decreased.

Surfacing and handing Emmylou the catch bag, she asked why I had surfaced earlier. Puzzled at her question, and holding onto the swim platform, I unbuckled, gave her the dive vest and tank, and said, "I didn't surface. What makes you think so?"

"You came up at the swim platform, started up the ladder, and went under again. You hadn't taken your mask and snorkel off."

"What color was the snorkel?" I asked.

"Black."

"What color is the one I'm using?"

She looked and turned back with an alarmed expression. "Yellow."

"So, what does that tell you? And I'll bet you didn't have that Colt Python handy, did you?"

“I sure did. It was on my lap where you told me to keep it.”

“Now you know why I told you some things that you think are in left field. These Islands are full of conniving thieves like that guy you saw. He was after the boat, thinking everyone was down-diving. You should-a-shot the son-of-a-bitch!”

Emmylou helped secure the diving equipment, set for the twenty-minute ride north to Bimini. We would be on time to get our catch to the cook at Blue Water Diner, having it ready for the evening meal.

Earlier that day, we departed Nashville in the Panther, flying into Miami Opa Locka, then a cab ride to the marina at 187th Street, where my thirty-three-foot Scarab lay waiting. Starting the engines to warm at idle, the through-hull exhaust from the big engines echoed a nice, deep rhythm. Our gear was secured, and we got underway, exiting Biscayne Bay’s tricky Haulover Inlet.

The Gulf Stream turned a deeper blue with the seas lying flat between the long, low swells, making three-quarter throttle at fifty miles per hour a pleasant hour-and-a-half ride to Victory Cay. The regular Friday weekend fishing boat traffic was headed to the Islands, and we planned the quick spearfishing dinner dive before clearing Bimini customs.

Arriving at Bimini’s Blue Water Marina, I reversed the throttles, easing the boat into the assigned slip. Emmylou had placed the bumpers, secured the bow line, and scampered back to secure the stern. Old hat! We then waited for customs on the dock while they checked in another boat...

With customs paid, Emmylou took our catch up the hill to the restaurant cook, while I visited the mariner’s office to register. We had a two-night reservation at The Complete Angler Hotel, Hemingway’s old hangout, where the hotel’s Friday and Saturday night dance floor resonated with Goombay Island music mixed with rum and Coke and piña colada, transforming inhibited into uninhibited. “Weekend

Bohemians” cast aside all decent rules of moral behavior, and Emmylou and I joined right in.

The weekend dive trip was twofold. I was to meet a guy who had committed to buying an airplane. “Jose” had approached me at Chub Cay, asking if I would sell him my Navajo Panther.

What is a Navajo Panther? The Panther is a twin-engine, cabin-class Colemill conversion of the shorter fuselage Navajo, converted at Nashville’s Cornelia Fort Airpark (M88). Bill Colbert, the owner, had designed and patented a twin-engine, seven-eighths-place plane with inter-coolers on the 350 hp Lycoming engines, four-bladed Q-tip props with winglets, increasing the gross weight, climb rate, and speed to hot rod class—a smuggler’s choice.

I politely refused “Jose” but offered to sell him another. He asked if I’d take cash. Without hesitating, I responded, “Yes.” Word had gotten around in that island element of people I was a reliable, safe source for purchasing a “ghost plane.”

There were three Panthers on the market, and I had the specs in hand on the one selected for Jose. Arrangements had been made for Jose to meet me at Bimini with cash. The premium price I’d quoted included a nice commission. After receiving the money, I’d deposit the cash through the insurance agency’s business and cut a check for the seller. I would then complete the FAA paperwork, registering the plane to “whatever name” was given to me at someone else’s address. Usually, the FAA’s aircraft “pink slip” transaction was completed within two to three weeks, and then I would deliver the plane to the new owner in the Bahamas—done deal. No laws were broken, as I handled it. As far as I was concerned, these were straightforward aircraft sales made with cash. The Panther’s new owner would never complete the FAA’s required transaction and remain autonomous.

Our government hates that cash is legal and invisible, unaware of what its plebeians are doing.

Saturday morning, I was up early, feeling the sun heating the harbor and savoring my coffee, when Emmylou suggested we go for a morning walk on Alice Town beach. It was a bluebird day. The sun was beating down on the sand under our feet. The little sandpipers scampering in front of us would run in front of the water as it rushed up on the sand from the small waves. They seemed to know exactly when to fly. After strolling along the beach, looking at sand dollars and other shells, we spread some beach towels and opened the small cooler, which held last night's half bottle of ice-downed Sauvignon Blanc. The leftover grouper, lobster, and the morning's freshly baked hard bread filled our tummies. Seagulls screeched with the other birds as they fought for the leftover bread as it was pitched to them in the air. Lying back on the towels, the sun and breeze melted pent-up anxieties, and we soon returned to our room for a short nap.

At about two o'clock, we motored twenty miles north and dove at Great Isaac Light House, which is always good for diving around thirty-five and eighty feet. We saw a couple of loggerhead turtles. Emmylou held on to his back for a short ride before turning loose. Several blacktips hung around the rocks and coral, thinking they could shag my catch bag. You must always keep an eye on them since they might go for my catch bag. There was no sign of a tiger shark or bull in the mix. I had bagged a couple of five-pound scamp and three lobsters for the night's meal—the meal's leftovers we'd have for snacks on Sunday's crossing.

After dinner that night, as I was getting our drinks at the hotel bar, a fellow hollered at me, calling me by name. I didn't recognize him from Adam. But I laughed, squinted, and hollered at him through the smoke and dim light, "Who is that?" It turns out that I had met him and his wife the year before in Guanaja, one of the small Bay Islands of Honduras.

Anchoring at Guanaja, they were sailing—living on a thirty-eight-foot Beneteau, having left California two years prior. Their next stop was

Roatan. I had flown a group of Nashville scuba divers to Guanaja for a five-day excursion and accepted the couple's invitation for the next day to sail with them to Roatan. That was my first sea sailing venture as I stood on the pulpit bow, whistling at the dolphins swimming alongside the boat's bow, turning sideways to look at me. At Roatan, we docked next to a fifty-four-foot Hinckley ketch, a beautiful Rolls-Royce twin-screwed sailboat. It was headed to Panama to pick up its owner, a wealthy Delaware real-estate developer. The captain's crew included the services of two young women: a dive master and a chef. We all rented motorbikes and toured the hilly island of Roatan. A couple of days later, I returned to Guanaja on a DC-3. Cash is handy.

Feeling very comfortable with this delightful couple and wanting to hear more about their sailing adventures, I invited them to our table. We spent the next few hours listening to their many escapades. It was a fun evening. Not wanting the repercussions of Cinderella, we retired before midnight.

I was awakened Sunday morning from the mast lanyards on the anchored blow boats, clanging, singing, and whistling in the stiff breeze between North and South Bimini. Sitting on the second-floor balcony, my first cup of coffee was warming my hands. Watching the sun peek over the horizon was always a favorite part of my day in the Islands. The morning's fresh innocence ensured that everything would be alright as I captured that early morning hour, hoping to keep that peaceful solitude in my pocket throughout the day.

I met Jose for breakfast. He was pleased with the Panther he was purchasing and handed me the cash in a paper sack. After paying Blue Water Marina's bill, Emmylou and I cast off Blue Water a little after noon and fell in with the returning fishing boat traffic headed to the Florida Coast. Westward bound across the Gulf Stream, we had rear quartering seas and wind, requiring me to jockey the throttles across the smooth rolling swells. Their span was wider than my boat's length, requiring me to throttle jump to the next swell like a fast-galloping

horse, bouncing every other stride. The ride was exhilarating once the rhythm was set—just hold on. Launching from one of the swells, a spray of flying fish jumped from the water with us, and a few landed on the deck but quickly flipped off.

Although required by U.S. Customs, I never afforded them the rude opportunity to check me into my own country. Having to deal with those totalitarian asses never fit well into my day, especially the complication of having to explain the amount of cash for Jose's airplane. Those Nazi bastards can seize whatever, requiring a citizen to prove its origin is legal—civil forfeiture is a blight on America's freedom. We docked at the marina, took a taxi to the airport, filed my flight plan, and then boarded.

The Panther's engines started and warmed up. I waited to receive Clearance Delivery's routing from Miami's Opa Locka Ground Control directly to Nashville's Cornelia Fort, knowing they might provide an amended clearance with deviations in the route. I would accept the clearance if they were minor or if directed to an unwanted radical change of heading or altitude; I'd simply cancel my Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) flight plan and proceed Visual Flight Rules (VFR) on my desired headings at a proper altitude.

Clearance was given and accepted. After a normal departure and reaching cruising altitude, the windshield sunscreen swiveled to my side window to block the glaring sun, which hung three hand widths over the western horizon. It's a four-plus-hour ride home if we didn't catch a significant headwind. Three hours passed, and it was dark as I peered at Emmylou sleeping in the co-pilot seat.

Experiencing mixed feelings of pleasure and remorse, I viewed Emmylou: a very nice-looking, spirited woman, tightly bound, black-haired, thirty-three-year-old, regional-rated tennis player who never took her game too seriously. We had met in a neighborhood bar a couple of years ago, where neither of us should have been without our

respective spouses. We were both a little crazy and enjoyed one another's company. Playmates! How long was the fuse on this hundred-ton bomb? Definition: *stupid*. And we both knew it couldn't last, whatever happened.

The plane's dash lights were dimmed, allowing for clear nocturnal viewing, as the heavens remained opaque, growing darker. We're cruising at eight thousand feet, doing 223 miles per hour across the ground. There wasn't much radio chatter besides Air Traffic Control (ATC) handing us off to the next sector.

During these times of solitude, my mind made a course correction, reflecting on my badly screwed-up life. Trips like these distracted me from focusing on one of the two mammoth problems of Damocles' sword, swinging ever closer to my neck's edge and plunging me into an abyss. And if that wasn't enough, I was carelessly forsaking a cherished wife who didn't deserve me as her husband. And my four children knew nothing of their Daddy's double life. It's like God said, "Man cannot love two things at one time." And that isn't half of it: I was running headlong into brick walls and knew it.

My mind wandered as the autopilot held its heading and altitude. It's amazing what Satan can do with rationalization. Some men fatally believe any problem is manageable until they hit reality and, if he's lucky, realize they can't whip Satan in *anything* and wisely rely on Godly power for a course correction.

However, this is not usually the case because man will not yield "self" to the Holy Spirit's guidance or control. Only the abiding Holy Spirit can slap the piss outta that son-of-a-bitch. Man cannot. You see, God gave all humans a conscience to inherently know right from wrong. I'm reminded of Romans 1:20–21 when man's "thinking became futile." Why do some men think they are the exception? That "little head" does the thinking, convincing man he's the exception.

And speaking of exceptions, during my other scuba trips to the Bahamas, I'd be on the dock and witness sleek-looking thirty-eight-foot Cigarettes, Fountains, Magnums, Midnight Express, Scarabs, and Donzis, easily motoring into and tying up at various marinas. Intrigued, I gave those boats a closer inspection, only to find they were in rough shape. Two men were on each boat, absent any fishing tackle or scuba equipment, and they were bare bones of any cushion or life jacket. A forty-two-foot sport fisherman was docked at Blue Water, where I sat in my boat and watched as those men gathered. One of those bearded men, wearing Bermuda shorts, had a wooden leg, cowboy boots, and a Stetson hat! No doubt what these guys were up to.

Later that evening, I stood and watched from Alice Town Hill on North Bimini as those big, powerful, and loud offshore boats loaded whatever from an Island freighter. None of the "offshore" boats burned running lights—no sense in helping the Coast Guard or DEA, who were always looking for them.

They called it a "bonsai"—when those fifteen loaded boats would start together, headed for Florida's east coast sixty miles away, the crescendo of thundering noise from the through-hull exhausts of those big engines echoed across the water like the start of the Indianapolis Speedway. That action was exhilarating to me, and the seed from Robert Mitchum's *Thunder Road* began to germinate, producing a question: "Is that an option?"

The radio crackled as the plane approached Atlanta, with ATC instructing a minor course deviation and altitude change. I confirmed. They had their hands full, but they did a good job of safely separating air traffic. It gets crowded in some places up here.

Less than an hour later, Nashville ATC cleared me from the Nashville airspace to land at Cornelia Fort's 2,300-foot unlighted, short, and

narrow strip. The Panther's wheels protested with a laughing chirp, cheating the devil again.

I helped Emmylou with her overnight bag and dive gear into her car, and she headed home. After securing my plane, I did the same and headed to mine. Tomorrow, I'd deposit Jose's money in the bank and purchase the Panther. After all, that was the reason given at home for the weekend trip.

My ninety-day note on the \$1,300,000 loan was due at the bank on Wednesday. President Jimmy Carter's 1981 "excellent" economy had led to an increase in the prime bank interest rate to 21 percent. Damn, I didn't have enough to cover the interest. I'd have to borrow the interest payment to pay the principal's note. At 22 percent, the annual interest equals \$286,000, and the added principal is \$1,586,000. Consider for a moment that \$1,586,000 value in 1981 dollars equals \$5,750,000 in 2026 dollars!

WTF was I going to do?

Fred Turner was my banker now at Third National. I'd started with John Clay, who had moved up the bank's corporate ladder. Fred might grumble a little, but I would grumble more at the point and a half over prime. Can you imagine paying that amount of money in annual interest? That's like throwing money up a wildcat's ass—you'll never see it again. This interest madness was eating me alive. At this rate, my collateral securing the note would soon vanish. I had to hold on to keep my heart and mind from total panic. There didn't appear to be a way out of this great abyss!

Chapter Two

The Belle Meade Unicorn

Before I tell you how I wound up in the great abyss, let me share my background, so it makes sense. I was born June 14, 1937, in Nashville, Tennessee. I grew up in a privileged Belle Meade environment, playing golf and tennis at the Belle Meade Club. The city of Belle Meade developed from the former Belle Meade Plantation, with the land being subdivided and developed into residential lots starting in 1906, leading to the city's incorporation in 1938. A land development company bought most of the plantation's land in 1906, and the neighborhood was developed from that property before voters incorporated it as the City of Belle Meade in 1938. In 1963, Belle Meade became a satellite city within the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County. Still, it retained its independent city status and its own services, including a police force.

When I grew up in the late 1930s and through the 1980s, Nashville's Belle Meade was considered a good, safe neighborhood, occupied by middle-class to wealthy families. It was never considered a "hoity-toity," "we are better than you are" kind of place. Belle Meade Country Club was family-oriented, with golf and tennis, an Olympic-size swimming pool for the children, and a classical dining area. Members of the Belle Meade Club generally lived within the city limits of Belle Meade.

Because Nashville has become a desirable place for many types of businesses to base, it has attracted America's wealthy. Consequently, those people have migrated to the most desirable areas of Nashville to live, with Belle Meade as the primary destination. Thus, I consider myself a unicorn—a rarity—having been born and raised in Belle Meade and "grandfathered," tagged with the now present "uppity

class” of Belle Meade that most of those wearing that mantel migrated into.

So, I was privileged, but we were not wealthy—we lacked nothing in the upper-middle class and lived on Deer Park Drive near Richland Creek, where my brother Don and I spent many days rolling over rocks looking for snakes, frogs, crawfish, and other things that fascinated boys. Occasionally, we were lucky enough to hand-catch and release a bluegill. We gave plenty of latitude to any snake. Sometimes, our older tomboy sister, Betty, would join in, frightening us with stories about how the water bugs would eat into our legs and burrow into our bones. We thought she might be kidding, but we weren’t positive. A hundred yards downstream was the Jackson Boulevard bridge, where we often met cousins Mack and John, investigating the same critters. All of us would hop across the creek’s big stones by the Fort’s house. A few years later, I escorted Tish Fort to her SAP highschool sorority dance. She grew up to be a beautiful and interesting woman.

Richland Creek ran parallel to Harding Road/Highway-70, and the NC&StL railroad tracks also ran parallel from east to west. During those war years, big steam engines with white flags flying on the front, signifying army troops, never stopped gliding by, with their screaming whistles echoing through the countryside. In addition to the troop trains, passengers and freight trains ran day and night.

Dad’s brother, Uncle Mack’s family, lived behind us on a parallel street, Deer Park Circle, which allowed us cousins to play together, often running through the neighbors’ connecting yard. Our paternal grandparents lived on Jackson Boulevard, a few hundred yards away. Betty, Don, and I walked to Parmer School before moving to Woodlawn Drive in 1946. I was in the third grade at Parmer and began at Woodmont in the fourth grade. My little sister, Mary Corinne, was born in 1941 and had not yet started school.

On Deer Park Drive, Don and I recall watching Dad work on the attic fan (no air conditioning) and making a strange statement: “Boys, I may have to leave you and go fight in the war.” We knew nothing about war or Japan before they bombed Pearl Harbor. We were too young to understand what “going to war” meant—only that our Daddy was going to leave us.

Fortunately, he was deferred due to his family’s size and his involvement in the food business, M.P. Brothers Wholesale Grocery Company. During those war years, strange men in soldiers’ uniforms with metal helmets would walk through our yard at night, telling us to turn off the lights—part of the blackout drills. Gasoline was rationed and bought with “green stamps” as cars lined up at the filling station where the Belle Meade City Hall is today.

One day, Don and I helped Dad gather up his digging fork, shovel, and hoe, and headed to the backyard. We already had a small chicken pen behind the garage. “What are we going to do, Dad?” we asked.

“We’re going to plant a victory garden to grow fresh vegetables. You see, most of the commercial crops are going to feed the soldiers.” From 1942 to 1945, we knew about the war with the Nazis and the Japanese, but at that age, we couldn’t understand the horrors of war.

I arrived one day at Parmer School to see this huge steam engine road roller working on the school’s circular front drive. It was a steam engine just like a train engine—huffing and puffing, blowing smoke, and letting off steam. I watched it for a while, making all that noise. Today, Don tells the story of how we were both sick at the same time when we were six or eight years old. We slept in twin beds in the same room and were running a fever from some childhood sickness—mumps, measles, or something.

With the fever, I had a bad dream. In the dream, I was running down a narrow cliff road away from a big steam engine road roller chasing me. I had to get away. The next thing I remember is that I’m crouched in

the bedroom window and can't unlatch the screen to jump out, so I began forcefully hitting the screen with my shoulder until I tore it loose from the frame to get out. It was winter because heavy snow covered the ground. I jumped out of the two-story window and ran over to our neighbor, Mrs. Hill, telling her the road roller story. Of course, she called Mother, who immediately came and picked me up.

Mother later told me I didn't have a mark on me. I was barefoot in my pajamas. It's true; God looks after children and fools. I later asked Don why he hadn't stopped me. "I was asleep and woke up, and you were gone, and the screen was busted out," was his answer.

Belle Meade Movie Theater

Going to the Belle Meade Movie Theater in the mid-1940s for Saturday afternoon's *Happiness Club* cost a dime. Mother would give us some extra money for a candy bar or popcorn. Walking into the movie theater and looking up at the mirrored ceiling, we would see ourselves pointing and laughing. Usually, there was a stage performance of other children our age.

Then, Mr. Jordon would come on stage, dragging a stand-up microphone, announcing, "All right, boys and girls, it's movie time, and there will be no whistling, no booing, and no monkey business!" And everyone would loudly boo, whistle, and laugh as the theater lights were dimmed. As it was being played, the theater's large musical organ would slowly disappear into the stage.

First, we were shown a newsreel of the war's progress—action shots of airplanes, ships, tanks, and soldiers fighting on land far across the oceans. After the newsreel, the weekly serial picks up from the previous week, featuring episodes such as "The Thin Man," "The Green Hornet," "Superman," and "The Shadow Knows," among others. After the serial, we'd watch a movie—*Pinocchio*, *Dumbo*, *Lassie Come Home*, or *Bambi*. The film I most enjoyed was *Song of*

the South, based on Joel Chandler Harris' Uncle Remus stories, which featured the adventures of Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, Brer Bear, and other critters, along with their interactions.

From an Uncle Remus book, Mother would read us those stories repeatedly. We'd laugh so hard before she got to the funny part because we already knew how Brer Rabbit would trick Brer Fox—or Brer Fox and Brer Bear making the Tar Baby, sitting him in the middle of the road, waiting for Brer Rabbit to come along. I could spend all day listening to and laughing at those stories as my mother told them, just like those little critters. In later years, mimicking my mother, I laughed at those same stories when reading them to my own children.

Woodlawn Drive

In around 1946, Dad and Mother began looking at a larger home to buy. They selected Mr. Stirton Oman's home on Woodlawn Drive. During a visit to Mr. Oman's house, I wasn't allowed to roam around, but I did anyway. I saw Jack Oman in an iron lung in one of the upstairs bedrooms. He had polio. Fortunately, he recovered, and I later spoke with him at Montgomery Bell Academy about his experience. Dad moved our family into Oman's house, and we were introduced to "country living," although we were still in the city.

Dad firmly believed in chores for his two sons. Our colonial columned home sat on twelve acres at the corner of Woodlawn and Wilson Boulevard. Wilson, a rutted dirt road running beside our house, had many trees and limbs blown across the back field's wood-railed fences, running perpendicular to Westmont Avenue, which bracketed Dad's property on the back, beside Herbert Row on Lynnbrook Boulevard.

Don and I were introduced to and taught how to use a cross-cut saw. After clearing the trees and limbs from the fences, we were introduced to a hammer, twenty-penny nails, and a handsaw to replace the broken boards. Dad put some cattle and horses back there and filled the

chicken yard with chickens, a few ducks, and a billy goat. Later, Mary “Kin” Corinne wanted and received a pig for Christmas.

Dad would “borrow” Preacher, who worked for MP Brothers Co., to help with heavier chores at home. The first couple of years, our vegetable garden was tended by a mule. As anyone who has tended a sizeable vegetable garden knows, the ground is plowed in late winter to prepare it for spring planting, when it's disced and harrowed before the rows are laid in. I was nine or ten and fascinated by the way the mule worked as I watched and listened to Preacher “geeing and hawing” that mule, putting in the evenly spaced, straight furrows. Preacher tied the mule to a tree when Mother called Preacher to dinner. I knew the words and saw what needed doing, so I loosed the mule and took over where Preacher left off.

I thought I was helping out, but apparently not, when Preacher appeared, hollering at me! “Boy! Boy! Lord, have mercy! The Lord wouldn’t have-ya, and the devil wouldn’t know what to do wit-chu! Look at this mess!” I gave Preacher the reins and didn’t say nothing. Never did fool with that mule again before Dad got a tractor.

Don and I had our sides of the big front yard to cut with a new Whirlwind 30-inch walk-behind mower, a clay tennis court to maintain, an acre garden to cultivate and weed, growing vegetables for Mother to can in jars for the wintertime, horse stalls to muck, and wood-railed fences to keep whitewashed. Our sisters had their chores, including feeding the chickens and collecting eggs. Dad, being a member of the Belle Meade Club, afforded the family access to play golf and tennis. Swimming was always on the agenda in the summertime. The game of golf ran in our family and was expected to be learned under the skillful eye of George Livingston, Belle Meade’s golf pro for 35 years.

Woodmont School

It was a reasonably short couple of miles to school, and all neighborhood students walked. Betty, Don, and I would generally walk together, but Mary Corinne would meet her friend Alva Herbert (Ms. Frank Wilk) in the backfield and walk with her.

Alva and Kin remained great lifelong friends, playing tennis until Kin died of a blood clot in 2000. Kin was the prettiest and kindest of us. The littlest sister grew up to be a beautiful mother, married to Johnny Frist, MD, and at her passing, it was remarked, “God must have needed another Angel.” To this day, I can hear Kin and Alva hidden in a corner somewhere, always giggling and laughing about something.

Betty, Don, and I walked down Wilson Boulevard to Woodmont School. The Elken boys, Jack, Bob, and Larry, lived on the corner of Westmont and Wilson. A little further down on Wilson was Jerry Cornelious’ house.

There were also the Brighton Road neighborhood girls—Beth Creighton, Roseleigh Adams, Ellen Russell, and Sissy Davis—who walked to and from school together on Wilson Boulevard. They were always whispering and laughing about secret stuff. At that age, boys were unknowingly lost in “girl discovery,” so I usually hid in the bushes by the barn and threw dirt clods to make them run, shriek, and call me names. Only a few short years changed all those confused thoughts about girls.

Neighborhood Magnet

Dad kept the large stand-up back porch freezer fully stocked with ice cream, Eskimo bars, ice cream sandwiches, popsicles, and more. All our friends knew they were welcome to come by and help themselves. Occasionally, on the way home from school, some of the guys would get into an argument and fight in the middle of the road. Our school’s playground was hard dirt. The Woodmont School men’s club raised

enough money to have it hard-surfaced through organizing student paper drives and other drives. Woodmont erected two portable buildings for classrooms. One was Mrs. Dixon's fifth-grade class, located between the back of the school and the playground.

I guess Don instigated it. He and I were delegated to whitewash the cattle/chicken yard and cattle palen fence after coming home from school. I had delayed finding Don and his friends already at work. Where did the friends come from? Remember the ice cream freezer!

I'm not sure why I didn't get along with Larry Elkens. One day after school, everyone was gone, and we had a fight on the playground. We were both on the ground whaling the stuffing outta each other when I heard my daddy call my name, telling me to get up and go home. Mr. Bill Morehead, Billy's dad, was with him, and both were members of the Woodmont School Men's Club, surveying the playground for improvements. That night at dinner, everything seemed normal, but I knew punishment was coming, so I continued to sit after everyone was excused, leaving Dad and me at the table. Dad turned to me and asked, "Son, what were you fighting about?"

"I don't know!"

Dad grinned and asked, "Did you whip him?"

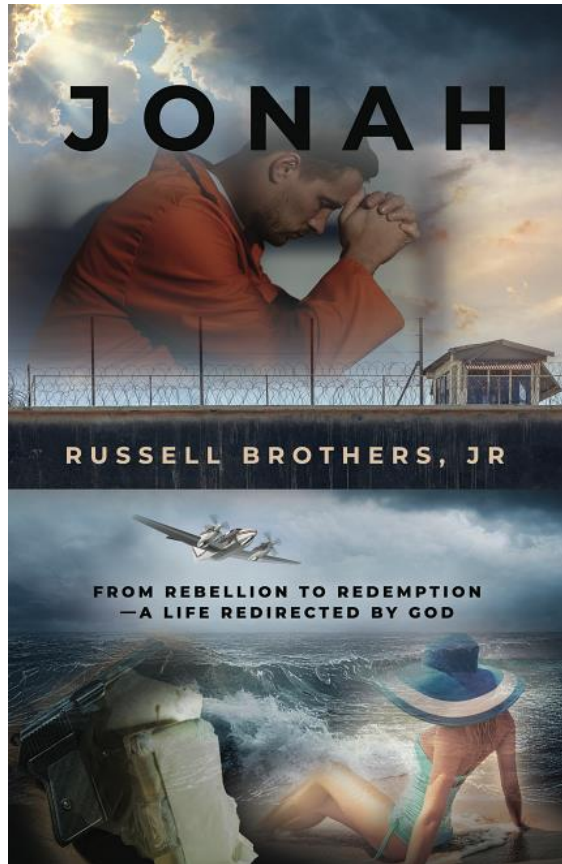
I was never so relieved.

Another neighborhood boy, Jerry Cooley, and I fought several times. One time, I remember him being on top of me and beating me up, when suddenly he wasn't there! Opening my eyes, I see sister Betty holding him by the hair of his head, slapping him as she said, "Leave my brother alone!" Whop!

Later, in the sixth or seventh grade, playing baseball on Herbert Field, Jerry and I got into it again, and I hit him with a couple of good licks, bloodying his nose and mouth. He left me alone after that.

Years later, I learned Dad used to fight a lot when he was younger. And even during those years in grammar and high school, I occasionally heard a hard edge in his voice when he was speaking to someone else. Dad was always an athlete, playing football at Washington and Lee, a good golfer, and played handball two or three times a week at the Y. He emphasized the importance of drinking plenty of water and eating a balanced diet.

Later in life, Uncle Mack told me about an incident involving Dad at a Belle Meade Country party during the War. It was a dinner-dance attended by guests, one of whom was an Army Major from Camp Campbell. Mother was beautiful, and this major had asked her to dance. Mother returned to the table before the dance was over, with Dad getting up and whipping that man's ass on the dance floor. As children, we learned early that Dad "didn't play the radio!" If he told us to do something, it wasn't a suggestion! And it wasn't long before he checked to see if you'd completed what he'd asked.



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