

TO CRY A DRY TEAR

Bill MacPhee's journey of hope and
recovery with schizophrenia

BILL MACPHEE
WITH
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iUniverse LLC
Bloomington

**TO CRY A DRY TEAR
BILL MACPHEE'S JOURNEY OF HOPE AND
RECOVERY WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA**

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*Brick walls, cold and white.
Heart pounding. I'm scared. Why am I here? How can I get out?
Distinct smells assault my nostrils.
Arrows pointing this way and that.
Are those arrows there for me? Am I the only one who can see
 them? Are they there for me to follow, to give me direction?
Numbers on the walls, lighting up.
Are they a code? What are they trying to tell me?
I am in a wheelchair, cold steel pressing against me.
Racing down the wide hall.
Urgency - nurses' voices shout at the other patients to stay in their rooms.
One tells me everything is going to be OK, trying
 to sooth me with her comforting voice.
Voices in my head tell me she lies.
Four nurses pushing the chair crowd me.
Arrows, they point the way out for me. I must escape.
A man at the end of the hall, dressed in white. Everyone in white.
An orderly. He is evil, I can tell. I can sense it. He looks
 normal, but I see he's evil because he isn't handsome.
I must get out. I must escape.
The exit in front of me, blocked by the orderly, the evil orderly.
Leaping out of the wheelchair. Running, coming up fast on the
 orderly. Move right, so does he. Move left, so does he.
I scream, "Get out of my way."
I swing. A connection. His evil face is contorted, blood
 gushes from his mouth, stains his white uniform.
I turn and cry in rage. Something crashes. People are yelling.
I must get out.
Confusion. Fear. Why was I brought here? Someone
 must know. Why won't they tell me?
Bright lights pin me in their glare. Blind.
Is this my resurrection? Is that why they brought me here?
I have to get out. I'm filled with an awful dread. Did He feel this?
Retrace my steps, past the nurses.*

*They scatter to make way for me. Nothing can stop me.
Run, get out. Its all a blur. They fear me, I can't be stopped.
Curious faces peer anxiously behind locked doors.
"Get him!" "Restrain him!" The voices yell.
Footsteps pound behind me, running, chasing me.
I see freedom, is this a dream?
Hands on my shoulders, around my neck.
I can't stand, going down.
"Get the needle"
What needle?
So many hands holding me down as I fight for freedom.
I struggle desperately like an animal in a trap.
The drugs take over, I have no strength.
Relaxing. I can't fight any more. I tried.
Dragging me towards a room. What's in there?
Blackness. Sleep.
Awake. How many hours have passed? How long have
I been here? It seems like seconds or days?
A bed. A strap across my chest. Shackles, thick blue plastic
shackles on my wrists and ankles. Too tight.
Calmer now. Confused. Maybe this is resurrection.
Soon someone will come to tell me what is going on.
The door opens. Two people walk into my room. They
look at me curiously. They're not dressed
like doctors. Jeans, regular clothes. Who are they?
Is this one Cassie?
It doesn't look like her. Maybe she was brought into
the hospital to be resurrected as well.
Is this my new body?
Am I Adam and is she Eve?
I reach out to touch her. I want to touch her. I want to caress her breasts.
Relief. She is here with me now.*

CHAPTER 1

INVINCIBLE

Looking down I see the water swirling and racing by thirty feet below. It looks menacing and dangerous, ready to suck me to the bottom of the Niagara River, yet it is an inviting challenge to a young daredevil. This water calls to me with a familiar voice, like an old friend. I've made this jump hundreds of times. The sun is hot and the steel bridge will burn my feet if I stay in one spot too long. I do the usual hop from foot to foot. I'm constantly checking to see if there is a train coming, or maybe a patrol officer from CN Rail to chase me off the bridge that connects Fort Erie, Ontario, Canada to Buffalo, New York. Neither the notion of danger nor any thought of safety enter my head. I'm focused on the fun we're having.

My name is Bill MacPhee. I am thirteen and am trying to decide if I am going to jump or dive into the Niagara River on this hot, sunny July afternoon. Its 1976 and it doesn't really matter what I decide. I've made this trip head first or feet first many times before. I feel no fear. The water is inviting, refreshing and deep and kids like me have been jumping off this bridge forever. Of course there's an unlimited amount of teenage bravado operating to focus our attention. There's no thought of danger, nor any possibility of "chickening out." We all do this. My boyhood friends and I think we're invincible as we climb higher and higher on the bridge.

This is it! One giant leap forward – no turning back. There is the feeling of nothingness beneath my feet. I'm falling through the air, hearing it rush past my ears. The wind blows through my hair. For a moment I'm dancing in space. Freedom. There's nothing like the excitement these fleeting seconds bring.

The adrenaline surges as I plunge beneath the water and am carried off by the swift current. The hundredth jump is the same as the first – yet the thrill is forever unique.

Holding my breath and closing my eyes I feel the sudden cold shock through my body as I splash down into the emerald liquid of the fast flowing river. My heart jumps as it has countless times before. I kick my legs feverishly. Up, up and finally I break the surface. I let out a gasp and breathe fresh air. From burning heat to freezing cold, it's been seconds.

Wow! That was fun! It was just as much fun every time before and every time after. This is life for a young man in Fort Erie.

The current carries me and two of my friends, Steve and Mike, down river quickly past the same familiar scenes - the coal docks, Steve's house, the big yellow rock, and Willy's dock. All are easily accessible stopping points if we want to get out of the water. Where will we land this time? Usually we get out at Steve's house, but occasionally we let the water carry us as far as five miles downriver before deciding we've had enough.

Jumping off the bridge was one of our favourite summer activities. We tried to be the first ones into the river each year around the 24th of May, not long after the last of the ice floes from Lake Erie had made their way down the river to their final plunge over the falls, a twenty kilometer journey. It was an important matter of personal pride – to be first. After our daring attempt at bravery, we'd run, teeth chattering,

with symptoms of hypothermia into Steve's house to warm up. Some years later Mike wouldn't come in the water that early.

"Chicken! Cluck, cluck, cluck! Mike's a chicken!" We would taunt and tease. Not me. I had no fear. Relatives and friends would exclaim, "You swim where? Where did you say you jump? When was that?"

Little did I know my lack of fear was establishing patterns in my life that would influence every part in the years to come. This personal characteristic would often get me into trouble later in life, but would also eventually be my saving grace and my greatest success. Perhaps it was as simple as the physical action of stepping off the ledge into the air that shaped my way of thinking for the rest of my life. Fear and danger became my friends. Somehow I would always be finding myself on ledges with thin air beckoning me forward.

I had a normal childhood, at least I believed it was normal. I thought every boy did the things I did.

Swimming was the love of my life! I grew up playing in the river. Fishing, water skiing and swimming. I wasn't supposed to jump off the bridge, but that never stopped me. From my early years Mom would walk me to swimming lessons at the Kinsman Pool in the morning, sit on the bench and watch my lesson, then back again in the afternoon for public swimming. I was at home in the water like I was born with fins and gills. I always had a great time, but it was never as much fun as jumping off the train bridge. It was probably the danger of it all, the fact that it scared my mother half to death and the possibility of getting caught and into trouble that made us such daredevils. My river excursions started around age twelve. My cousin Kevin and I started going to the train bridge and coal docks. On special occasions Kevin's uncle, Boy Cook, took us to Bertie Bay on Lake Erie or to Black Creek, further downriver toward Niagara Falls. I also loved jumping from the Black Creek bridge into the Niagara River. But the train bridge was our favourite. From

time to time the CNR police would run down the tracks on the bridge to shoo us off. They could never catch us, they were too slow. We'd just jump into the river (ending all cold water hesitation) and they'd leave us alone. I guess they never really cared much what happened to us – they never followed us on land, as we floated downstream, to arrest us or lecture us or take us home to our parents!

Floating down the river to Mike's house, we'd get out, teeth chattering, in search of other mischievous adventures. I recall one day we ventured over to a new house being built a couple of doors from Mike's. Not surprisingly we ignored the danger or trouble we could get in. There was a big roll of rebar and, of course, we took turns climbing on it to make it roll and spin. I fell backwards off it and when I went to get up discovered I couldn't move. I put my hand down and felt blood under me. I had fallen on the sharp end of the rebar and was transfixed with the steel embedded in my leg. Mike ran to get his Dad who came and gently freed my leg from the rebar. He took me to the hospital. I was scared he'd be mad at me but he wasn't. Mike's mom went and told my Mom what had happened. Later Mom told me she thought the lady was coming to tell her I'd drowned in the river, her greatest fear in those days. However, the doctor at the hospital cleaned out the puncture wound and patched me up just fine. I still have the scar to this day. I didn't get into any trouble this time. I guess Mom was glad I was okay. She probably was just relieved I hadn't drowned. I'm sure my adventures in those days didn't help my mother's already fragile mental health.

My Mom was scared all the time when we'd troop off with our water masks. She was sure one of us wouldn't come home one day.

Though I swam like I was born with fins, those fins didn't help me much when it came to school. I was an average student, and my teachers commented on my good behavior and attitude, but in general I didn't like school. I usually got Bs and Cs. Writing and spelling meant everything in those days and I was hopeless at both! My report

cards always noted poor writing skills. I couldn't write neatly if my life depended on it. I tried holding the pen different ways, writing slower or using a different slant. It still all came out looking like chicken scratching! No matter what the teacher said, I could read my writing and that was the important thing – wasn't it?

“Billy, you have to do something about that penmanship. If you ever want to amount to anything, you need to be able to write.” To this day my grade seven writing teacher's voice rings in my ears like a dull noise. In a dramatically ironic way, her negative attacks about my writing would become the force that drove me to succeed. I had to prove to her and the world that I could achieve. Later the written word would become the core of my personal and business life, bringing purpose and fulfillment far beyond any ideas I could have had then. I was born with a need to prove those around me didn't know the real me and I would show them my abilities by my success. It was like a sharp stick in the backside and I used it to propel me forward. I still do!

I did have some teachers I liked though. In kindergarten I had Mrs. Archer. I remember her kindness. She gave us towels to lie down on for our naps. In grade four I had Mrs. Thomas. When I met her years later she told me I was her best student. I'm not sure if she actually meant it or maybe she said that to all her former students and was just being nice to me!

I was quiet, obedient and respectful in school. Over time it became normal to just give me average marks automatically. I'm not sure if many teachers ever read my written work, probably because they couldn't! They'd just give me the average grade. I remember Mrs. Chow in grade six, Mr. Rosettani in grade seven as well as Mr. Abbys. I enjoyed all these teachers. I remember Mr. Walters. I liked him but he taught English, my worst subject. Since I was attending a Catholic school, I thought it odd that he wanted to talk about the racetrack all the time. In those days devout Christians didn't frequent the racetrack.

One teacher I didn't ever get along with was Sister Selema. She was the music teacher and I couldn't relate to music. In another of life's pleasant ironies, today my son Dwight plays the piano and guitar. I think this is a great gift he has and his teacher says he has an ear for music. He must have this gift from my wife Aileen. Not me, I used to play the triangle!

I went to a Catholic school from kindergarten to the eighth grade. When I was getting ready to go into grade nine, I wanted to go to Notre Dame College School in Welland with my friends, but my father wouldn't allow it. He said I'd have to mix with other kids eventually. The real reason was that Fort Erie Secondary School, where I ended up going, was free and Notre Dame cost money. We never had a lot of that. Even now when Dad has extra expenses at his nursing home he worries.

My parents never went to church or claimed to be religious, and to be honest, at the time I just went through the motions. I started attending St. Michael's Church at a young age. I became an altar boy and served at funerals, baptisms and weddings. I had my first Communion and Confirmation. I was the altar boy at my sister's wedding. I remember being terrified at Confirmation, praying that the Bishop wouldn't ask me a question. In the weekly services I was fearful when it was my turn to hold the reading for the priest, because I never knew when to turn the pages. It all seemed like the thing to do but I understood next to nothing. As I got older, I only went to church on holidays. In fact, I used to try to convince my friends to play baseball instead of going to church. I drank with my buddies but in my confession only admitted to my lack of attendance at church. That seemed a lot safer. I can remember my mother talking about giving to the church and getting back twice as much. I figured it must be some sort of financial plan. I had no faith and felt the church had no power. I wasn't even sure there was a God. But, as my father sometimes says, I was always a seeker.

I always loved my Dad and to this day hold high respect for him. But he did have his personal quirks. He was a no-nonsense father but he

would spend a lot of time with us kids. His was a curious combination of strictness and fatherly involvement. If we wanted to go to the Sugar Bowl to play he would take us. The Sugar Bowl was and still is a giant park in the middle of Fort Erie. When the highway was constructed to the Peace Bridge, the construction crew mined gravel from this part of town and created a huge bowl in the earth. The town, with unusual creativity, turned it into a park with swings, a pond and other areas to explore. Dad would park the car and sit there reading his newspaper. We followed the paths and explored the forest that used to be there. Sometime later the Clemence family boys, friends of mine, got BB guns. We'd play war in the woods. I remember actually hearing pellets whiz by my head. Safety wasn't an issue for us. One time I caught Mike running down a path ahead of me. I hollered at him to stop and when he didn't I shot him in the back with my BB gun. Fortunately we never seriously hurt each other, no eyes were ever lost. Dad would beep the horn when he figured we'd been there long enough. On other occasions, he took us to the pump house at the river to swim and play in the sand. He'd bring his newspaper and read, but he was never one for sand castles. On weekends Dad played billiards. It was his hobby. He was a great pool player, the best in town, but he had an awful habit of swearing, particularly in the pool hall. I didn't like that. And everybody smoked in our house except me. Then it was just accepted as a habit. Life at home had its positives and negatives, like most other families I suppose.

Dad would take us to Helen's lunch restaurant on Gilmore Road once a week when Mom was in the hospital, it was a great treat. Mom was in the hospital a lot. With time she became a "stranger" to our family. We had a "family secret" that I didn't know till I was about eight. Our Mom had been married before and had three kids from that marriage. Tom, Cathy and Jack were my half siblings, and my father was Mom's second husband. This was a much bigger deal in those days than it is today. I respected my Dad because he adopted the other three kids and raised them as his own. Mom's first marriage was very difficult for her.

There was violence and abuse. I now have some understanding of the relation between mental illness and violence when a partner doesn't know. My mother suffered from manic depression and I didn't have much respect for her. She was always in the hospital. Now we know she was bipolar. Then she was just "sick" or "had breakdowns." At the time I didn't know either of those names. She'd accuse Dad of running around and was paranoid of our neighbors. I saw this as "weakness" at the time and was embarrassed for my dad. I constantly wondered, "Is Mom going to get sick again? Is she going to do or say something out of the ordinary?" One time in my teens I went to our family doctor and I questioned him, perhaps a bit too sharply. Mom underwent all kinds of blood tests and the doctor got the results but he could never tell us what was wrong or when she was getting sick. His reply was that they really didn't know and couldn't predict. I felt frustrated when this went on in our house. I told very few people of her hospitalizations, partly because I didn't understand what was happening and partly because I thought I was the only one who had a sick mother. At the time I saw her illness as a flaw in her character. Now when I talk to people I knew in high school, I find out I wasn't the only one with a sick parent after all. I wasn't the only one to think it was happening just in my family.

At a young age I probably knew the way from my house to the hospital better than the back of my hand. We'd make the trip every night when Mom was sick. Dad would leave me in the waiting room beside the wishing well, for hours while he was visiting Mom. Kids weren't allowed in the psych ward in those days. My wish was always the same – that my Mom would get better. She would be in hospital for three months at a time, only allowed home on weekends. On one occasion when she came home for the weekend, she couldn't keep still. She was up and down from her chair, cleaning house and pacing back and forth. We'd yell at her to sit still, read a book, watch television – anything. But she wouldn't or couldn't. When she went back to the hospital my Dad told the nurses what was going on. It turned out my Mom was on the wrong medication and that's why she was behaving that way. It made us feel pretty guilty.

Years later, as I lived through my own personal hell, I remembered Mom and wondered how she survived. My respect for her returned – I knew firsthand how difficult it is to battle mental illness.

Dad had average ambition. He started working in the shop at Horton CBI (Chicago Bridge and Iron) at age fifteen. He began as a “gofer,” and later moved to the office where he became a draftsman. He worked his way up to squad leader. This meant he supervised the other draftsmen and checked their work. He worked there twenty-nine years. I never got an allowance but Dad would give me money for movies on Friday nights. He was thrifty.

We never met any of my Dad’s family – this was always a mystery to us. One day when I was about twelve a stranger knocked at our door when Mom and Dad were both out shopping. He said he was our grandfather and wanted to know if Dad was home. I found it odd when he didn’t stay around and I told my parents when they came home. I don’t recall any reaction from my Dad. Dad was very proud of his mother though. He sometimes would tell us about her. She was a great piano player and played for the silent movies at the Bellard Theatre on the Boulevard in Fort Erie. She became the first female customs officer at the Peace Bridge, a significant achievement in those days. Oddly, we never met her or visited her. Nor did she ever come to our house. To this day I still wonder just what went on in Dad’s family to create this unspoken absence of his relatives from our lives. My Dad’s grandfather was the first mayor of Bridgeburg, the old Fort Erie. Maybe our family was “famous,” possibly for the wrong reasons and Dad wanted to shelter us from our background.

In our family of four kids, it was often my sister, Cathy, who is about nine years older than me, who filled in for Mom when she was sick. Around age twelve Cathy started to basically run the whole house. She kept the house neat and tidy, prepared meals and packed our lunches. One time it all “went to hell.” Mom was really sick for a long time and

Cathy couldn't keep up with taking care of the family and the yard. The yard became a mess and we all were on pins and needles all the time. She loved to have fun too. One time at our parents' cottage in Muskoka, late at night when everyone was laughing and drinking around a campfire she and I dared each other to swim across the lake in the dark. We both took off our clothes and swam across to a neighbor's dock. At home Cathy was very popular. She belonged to a sorority in her high school years. Cathy and her friends would be in the basement and they used to call me down and say how cute I was. I thought I was the luckiest kid in town. I was about seven or eight at the time. Cathy was a great sister to me all those years. Later when she got married she moved to a house in Crescent Park, a subdivision in Fort Erie. Her husband worked midnights in a grocery store and she was afraid to stay home alone at night. I used to stay at her house to keep her company. I would joke that she was my favourite sister but she'd reply, "I'm your only sister." She lives around the corner from me now and we're still very close. We often take care of our Mom together at the nursing home, and she takes care of our Dad, making meals, and doing his laundry. I respected her and didn't cause her any problems when I was young. I still hold her in high esteem today.

Cathy

Mom went after Dad and me once. She thought we were out to attack her. She couldn't sleep at night. She was manic. She would vacuum at 3am and wake us all up. I recall one incident when I was in a sorority and we planned a bake sale. I wanted to bake cupcakes but Mom wouldn't let me. On the other hand when she was well, she was wonderful. We couldn't understand it. We had a great life. Her sickness came out of the blue. Mom would get sick and go out in her nightgown to the graveyard. The police would bring her back. If she went out for a walk she would peer into neighbors' windows. She often accused Dad of running around. When she was well Mom was there for her whole family. She would take dinner to

our grandparents every night when she was well. She was a terrific person. I never discussed this with friends outside our home. Back then we didn't talk about this.

One time we took Mom to Hamilton for shock treatments. I went with Dad. It seemed the hospital staff blamed us for her illness. There were lots of locked doors. When we brought her home Mom looked like she was 100 years old. She was a mess. The psychiatrist put us through hell that day. I just smiled at Mom and that made him angry.

I often wondered why Dad stayed with her, he was so kind. Dad "hit" her only once. Dad had been through hell, she would leave at night. He didn't know what to do so he called the police. She had been harassing him all day. I remember lying awake at nights crying – it wasn't fair. What caused all this? We thought nobody else had this problem. Nobody talked about it. Grandma would say, "Don't tell anyone."

When Mom was well she was an excellent homemaker. She was proud of her house and liked it clean. It seemed, however, that around Christmas something would always happen. There would be an accident or Mom would get ill. She would say, "It doesn't seem like Christmas around here." It never did!

When Bill left for Singapore Mom was very upset. He was so far away. She worried about him every day. When Bill dated women in Singapore they were all "too dark" for Mom. But Mom immediately loved Aileen (Bill's future wife) when she met her!

Much of our family life revolved around Mom and her illness. It influenced and permeated every aspect as we grew up and into our adult lives. Dad was Mom's second husband. Dad married Mom when she had three kids and adopted us all. Dad was and still is special for what he's done and what he took on.

Bill

On the other hand, I never got along with my brother Jack. He is six years older than I am. It seemed he was always in trouble. He didn't care about school, so he always took special ed. He seemed to waste his life in my eyes. People said he had a "chip on his shoulder." He had "attitude." To this day he lives alone in subsidized housing. In my mind I mistakenly blamed him for Mom's sickness and her many hospital stays. She worried about him all the time and he caused her many heartaches. That part of my childhood was unpleasant and I was filled with hatred toward Jack. We'd always fight over the TV station. Today my disgust toward Jack is somewhat tempered by my understanding of the many challenges that accompany his situation. My parents would visit Jack in Welland and I would go with them. Once he got stabilized and out of the house he moved around a lot. He didn't get along with Dad and Dad told him he couldn't come back home. He was the author of his own difficulties and his own worst enemy. He was content to stay as he was, never making an effort to change.

I can now say with confidence in an ironic, negative sort of way, one of the reasons for my success today with my own family and our business is my brother Jack. I never wanted to turn out like him. His life has been a constant reminder to me and a key driving force for the measure of success I've achieved myself.

My other brother Tom is the oldest in the family. He is eleven years older than me and he made everybody proud. He was the perfect son in the family and star pupil at school. He was always the centre of attention and seemed to excel at whatever he attempted. I had great respect for him and always felt safe around him. He was an athlete, high school football star and became a policeman. At Christmas time he'd give great presents. One time he gave me a whirlybird helicopter and I thought it was the best present. He built his own bedroom in our basement. As close brothers like to do, we'd wrestle down there. It was great.

Sundays in our family always seemed to be a ritual when I was a kid. It was a day for most to sleep in, but I never did. Why waste a day by sleeping half of it away? I'd get up early and watch cartoons or play by myself – anything to keep busy. Sunday night was homework and bath night. It was also Ed Sullivan's really big "shooooow."

At the age of thirteen I got my first real job. I was a Dickee Dee ice cream boy. I took my position seriously. It was my first foray into the exciting and dangerous world of business and making money. I was a little young for the job, but I looked older since I was "big boned." At least that's what they called fat kids in those days. So I peddled around on a bicycle with a freezer attached to it, ringing my bell, selling barely-frozen ice cream during the long lazy summer days. It was a good experience learning to handle money, even in small amounts. I suppose the exercise and sweating helped me shed a few pounds too. At the end of my first day on the job, I got my initial hard lesson in business when my accounting didn't add up. I cursed the big kids for ripping me off. They'd do a planned raid – come at me six at a time. While I was serving one, the others took ice cream behind my back. Then when I tried to collect the payment, they'd deny they'd had any. They relied on the confusion factor – it often worked and I was left furious but helpless. I had to learn how to avoid places I might run into those guys. That job lasted two summers.

I have many good memories of growing up, especially of the Squires. This was the equivalent of a church youth group today. To join the Squires you had to be thirteen. In historic times, squires helped medieval knights dress for battle. We were the Junior Knights of Columbus so Squires was a fitting title. It was a great organization to be part of as a kid. We had weekly meetings and would play floor hockey or basketball. There was a chart and each member would get a certain amount of points for showing up at special events and meetings. We'd also work at the bingos held at the Fort Erie Race Track. We'd set up the tables Friday nights, then Sunday mornings we'd clean up the garbage and

sweep the floors. It took us all day. We earned points for this work too. The point system was the way to qualify for the annual trip up north.

The trip took place every year around Christmas. It was a Catholic camp called Kumuntome. I can still see the cookhouse – it was a large building with a fireplace at one end and a huge wood-burning stove at the other. The camp had about five cabins, each big enough for six people to sleep. It was very cold but once the wood stove got started things would warm up and the flies would come to life and buzz around. I went on this trip four years in a row.

On one of our trips we went into Owen Sound for pizza and a movie at night. The priest, one of our supervisors, was called out of the theatre for a message that we found out later was bad news. Cabin rivalry and competitions were a huge tradition. Apparently some of the cabins had had a snowball fight and they had hung a blanket over a doorway to protect the fort. Due to their carelessness, the blanket had caught fire while we were away. It was too close to the stove. As a result the cabin burned to the ground. The kids from that cabin got sent home early! I was glad it wasn't my cabin.

The highlight of the camp, a daring midnight trek to a haunted house, took us through dark woods, over a lake, through deep snow, up a hill, through a field and over a barbed wire fence. This brought us to a road that led to the house. By this time we were all cold, soaked and thoroughly worn out. I remember walking up the driveway and feeling a frightening chill go through me. No Hollywood producer could ever make me as scared as that haunted house did. It was huge. If we weren't shivering and shaking from the wet and cold, we certainly were at the sight of that house. Three stories, broken windows and the corpse of an old rusted car next to the field gave us an eerie welcome in the dim light of the moon. There was an old well in the backyard that we were warned to keep away from.

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About twelve of us frightened, shaking boys entered the house, all huddled tightly together like we were packed into a subway car. We walked up the stairs, broken floorboards all around and suddenly someone screamed. A ghost disguised as a dangling wire had brushed someone's shoulder. A door slammed in the wind and we ran back down the stairs in terror, but not before we gave at least one more thought to the coffin-like box in the basement. I'm sure everyone believed it housed a vampire who slumbered until it was time to greet the night and search for frightened boys.

Those were the good old days.