

Metamorphosis

By

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Perspectives

*Am I an eagle or am I a man,
No doubt, I'm confused of what I can be,
For there is no other in this land,
As shortly you will see.*

Currently I am lifted by an upward air current as I circle high above a tourist area known as Skyline Drive just south of Front Royal, Virginia. The air is clear and I can clearly see the cars and people exploring the views high above the cliffs that rise above a plain nearly 2,000 feet below. And I am ever watchful for possible fires grown out of control by careless tourists as well as people too dangerously close to the edges of the cliffs. From time to time I call in a check to the park rangers or rescue personnel to let them know of my status or any potential problems. It occurs to me from time to time that I could easily be replaced by an unmanned drone or a small piloted airplane to do a similar job. But I'm not complaining. I seem to have been born with this "duty" in my soul (if, in fact, I have a soul.) But first, you need to know a little bit more about me. I was born with the name Burton Manne to a young couple in Virginia. I am told I was rather precocious as a child although always small and light for my age. I loved school and even more, learning on my own through the internet services like the Kahn's Academy. I have always been fascinated by our universe and even considered some day of becoming an astrophysicist to explore such phenomena as the Higgs Boson (some call it the God particle) and the phenomena of gravity, light, magnetism and heat. But that was all before my body began to

rapidly change. Now I am simply Bird Man! I am a one-of-a-kind creature that is a weird combination of human and bird. Thanks to my father and mother, the chronology of my existence has been well preserved by written records of every detail of my life and my creation. Others have shared their records and memory with me and I now share them with you since I am no longer able to leisurely sit by the fireside and provide the details of my existence.

But one final thought – don't feel sorry for me as I have long ago accepted my fate. And I have found a deeper love of nature and our world than one could even imagine. If you have loved a pet dog or cat, you know that love exists in many, many forms. I have found such love in numerous relationships and places. Existence, no matter in what form or for how long, is sheer joy.

Marriage and Home

A couple in love is such a wonder to see
Their friends share their happiness with glee
And join with anticipation their joining together
Embracing and loving each other forever.

Jane and Austin exchanged their marriage vows in a local Unitarian Church in Huntington. It was attended by an overflow crowd of friends and relatives of both families. The football team took nearly half of the available seating. Jane's bride maid was her best friend Tracy. Don Johnson was the groomsman. Before the ceremony had begun, Jane's parents and Austin's parents had both asked them to meet them shortly after the wedding and before the reception began. They would not say why but it was obvious that they had a surprise that they wanted to share equally.

The wedding itself was beautiful. Jane and Austin had written their own vows, selected the singer and flowers (with the help of Jane's mother) as well as the sequence of events. The reception was scheduled at a local hotel banquet room and everything arranged by Austin's father. Following the ceremony and leaving the church, Jane and Austin circled to the back of the church and entered the room that the minister and choir typically used before a church service. There they met their parents.

Austin's father spoke for both sets of parents. "Son and daughter, we know you are about to begin the rest of your lives. We also know that, in spite of scholarships and student work, you have little resources to purchase a home before you begin your careers. We have discussed this among ourselves and have decided to loan you the amount you need for a down-payment on a modest home of your choosing. We will make these funds available to you with the current interest of 4.5% and expect repayment in installments

over a five-year period if you are agreeable to these terms. The amount is \$20,000.00 which, as first-time home buyers, should permit you to acquire a nice home at current interest rates. Payments to us would be about \$372.86 a month which should be manageable if you obtain a thirty year mortgage. We wish we could afford more but you know we are pretty stretched ourselves.”

Austin and Jane looked at each other with both surprise and bewilderment. Both had recently acquired jobs through the university placement office. Austin would be working in a bank in Washington D.C. and Jane would be teaching dancing in a dance studio located in Front Royal, Virginia. They would live in between D.C. and Front Royal so they could live in an area without both having to commute a long distance and be able to purchase a home at a cost much lower than the costs closer to Washington D.C. Austin spoke first:

“I can’t speak for Jane but I am overwhelmed that you all have been able to conspire together to help us get started in life. I think with the cost of homes in our new location, that, with your loan, we can find a suitable place to purchase. I, for one, would love to accept your generous offer.”

Jane joined in “Yes, I certainly did not expect this and am likewise amazed that you guys could come together and hatch such a generous offer. I agree with Austin and think it would speed our ability to obtain a home and get established in our new life. Thank you all for your generosity.”

With that, Mr. Manne handed Austin a cashier’s check for twenty thousand dollars.

The Infection

A day of calm with sun warms the soul
And beckons us to take a leisurely stroll
Across a beautiful flower strewn meadow
And feel God's earth that is incredible
Not fearing a thing that could appear
Or from our destiny away to steer

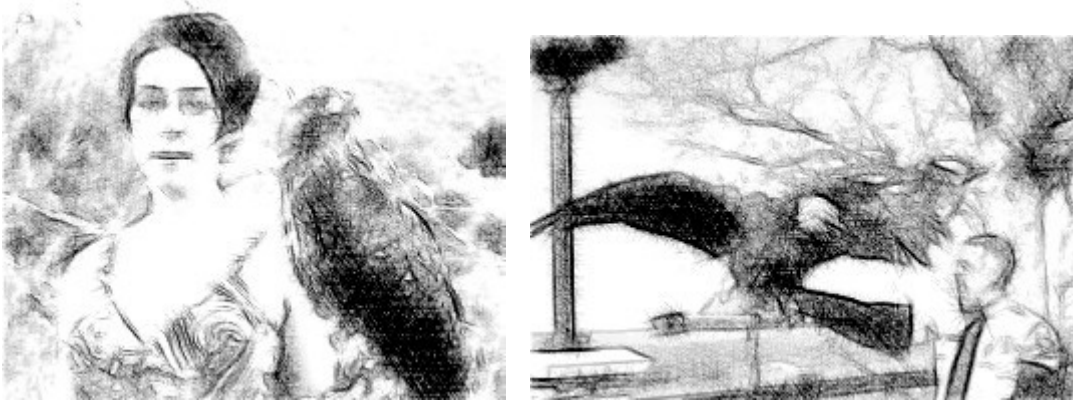
It was one of those perfect May days with a nearly cloudless sky, a light breeze that stirred only the tall grass and a mild seventy two degrees. Jane and Austin had begun their Saturday morning as they had for many weekends. A breakfast of bacon and eggs with a fresh pot of coffee was their nearly ritualistic start every Saturday that they were to begin their favorite sport. They had been married nearly two years now and were living in their first home since finishing college. Their home, located in the Shenandoah River valley about twenty miles from Front Royal, Virginia was purchased with the loans from their parents. Austin travels to Washington D.C. by driving to a commuter train every day that stops close to where he is employed in a downtown bank.

This month was a special time. The couple had finally been able to repay their parents earlier than anticipated for the down payment loans on their home. Up to this point they had been using birth control but now felt they could afford to have at least one child. To celebrate they arranged to have a special lobster dinner in Front Royal. After returning home from their dinner, they made passionate love.

Jane and Austin are both physically strong and share many sporting activities. It was about a year ago that a friend introduced them to falconry and they had acquired and

trained their own birds. This beautiful day was one of the best that they could have to practice this sport. Austin had acquired a large eagle that weighed nearly three and a half pounds and sported a wingspan of about four feet. He named him Joey. Jane had acquired a smaller two-pound red-tailed hawk she named Chloe. As birds of prey, when released they are expected to search for a rabbit or other prey, pick it up and return with it to the arm gauntlet from which they were released. The birds had their own side-by-side cages at home and were treated as treasured family pets with food, water and time with their owners sitting next to their cages and talking to them. The birds seemed to be genuinely bonded to their masters.

It was ten in the morning when Joey and Chloe were mounted on the arms of their masters.



As they walked toward a ridge, their favorite hunting ground, the sun was bright and reflected off the water of the river which lay about a half mile away. Once the birds were released it typically was about ten to fifteen minutes before they returned with a prey. A high-pitched whistle could be used to call them back if they delayed too long. Jane and Austin released their birds simultaneously and watched as they rapidly climbed the wind currents off the ridge. They could see them circle and glide and even dive for their prey.

It was only eight minutes when Joey could be seen in a steep dive toward a prey. Austin followed the plunge and signaled Jane to watch. As they followed the bird swoop back up, they were both caught in a blinding glare of sunlight and instinctively raised their arms to shield their eyes from the glare. It was at that moment that Jane felt a sharp, heavy object land on her bare arm. Instead of landing on the gauntlet of the right arm which she normally raised for her bird, Joey mistook Jane's raised left arm for his perch. As usual, Joey gripped the arm and with his beak grabbed a spot near the wrist in order to steady himself. Jane felt the talons dig into her flesh and the beak penetrate her wrist as Joey struggled for balance. Writhing in pain, Jane was able to transfer Joey to the gauntlet on Austin's arm. Jane's arm was bleeding from the puncture wounds of the bird's talons. She felt a burning sensation that shot throughout her body. She doubled over in pain and agony. Austin retrieved her hawk and they hurried back to the house, caged their birds and went in the house so Austin could retrieve the first aid box and treat Jane's wounds. Austin had to "butterfly" the area where Joey's rear claw had ripped a large gash as he struggled to balance. He applied an antiseptic to the wound and wrapped her wrist with sterile gauze.

Typically, it was Jane who had to "patch up" Austin as he and his college buddies sometimes got too rough in a weekend of playing football. Today was a reversal of roles. But this was no small injury and it took several hours with pain medication for Jane to even be able to move her arm for a short period of time. They, of course had immediately called the emergency room at the hospital in Front Royal and made the painful ride to the hospital for treatment. Jane was gaunt and white with the pain and her face contorted as she struggled to endure the pain. After stitches were taken and pain

medication given, it was late in the evening before she was released and they could make the trip back to their home.

That evening as they tried to relax and talk, they agreed that they need to acquire special sun glasses that would screen out glare and bright sunlight yet not block the beauty they savored in their falconry sport. Austin also checked Joey and told him he knew it was not his fault and Joey's movement of thrusting his head back and forth convinced Austin that Joey understood him.

Sunday was a day to relax, check messages from friends on the Internet, watch a movie and sit on their porch to enjoy the day as well as talk or read a book. Austin had changed the dressing on Jane's arm and marveled at how quickly she seemed to heal. Jane agreed and except for a much more mild burning sensation, felt hardly any discomfort from the wounds.

At this time, Jane and Austin did not know that Joey had been infected with the West Nile Virus. Modern research has demonstrated that a virus can carry a portion of DNA from one source into another host. In this case, a portion of Joey's DNA was transmitted to the blood of Jane and subsequently into her womb where it combined with the DNA of her embryo.

Pregnancy and Birth

For every beginning there is an end
This is a fact and not just a trend
And in between can be some trouble
That bursts upon us just like a bubble
Ah, if we could only know what is coming?
Would our heart want to stop its strumming?

Jane was in her fifth month of pregnancy before her first ultrasound image was taken. Her obstetrician was delighted to share the image with her and show her she was going to have a healthy baby boy. While Jane had gained little weight, the baby seen on the image appeared healthy, with a large chest, wide-set eyes and long healthy arms. At this point, Jane and Austin felt they could tell their family the good news. Soon both of their parents were sending baby clothing, toys, furniture and everything they needed to take care of their new baby. Selecting a name became a fun hobby. They considered family names, fun names, and movie star names. They finally settled on the name Burton since Jane had fond recollection of a favorite movie in which the hero's name was Burton. So there it was. He would be named Burton Manne.

Jane's labor started at 3:00 A.M. and roused Austin from a sound sleep. They quickly grabbed the canvas bag that they had previously packed with clothing for both Jane and the new baby. It was only about a five mile trip to the hospital in Front Royal but at night one needs to drive carefully for there are stray animals, even bears, sometimes on the dark road to the city. They arrived by 3:45 A.M. and Jane had called ahead to roust her physician from her sleep so she would be there to aid in the delivery of Burton. A wheel chair was available at the door and Jane was quickly seated and

escorted to the delivery room with Austin following. She was met at the delivery room by her physician Dr. Katy Monroe with whom she had been seeing over the past 8 months. Dr. Monroe had her change quickly into a delivery gown and had Austin also put on a gown, rubber gloves and facemask so he could be close to Jane during the delivery. Austin looked a little pale and was not sure he was ready to see the details of the birthing process but knew that Jane wanted him to be involved at every step. An epidural was administered within fifteen minutes of the beginning of the delivery and the baby was delivered within ten minutes of that. All in all, it was a fast and easy birth. Burton was rapidly swaddled in a blanket and a nurse administered eye drops and cleared his palate of any residual material. Dr. Monroe left the room as soon as she was sure that the afterbirth was complete and Jane was in no further danger. She returned in fifteen minutes with a report on the baby. She reported that Burton was doing fine and appeared to be quite healthy although she was quite surprised that his weight was only four and a half pounds yet his size would suggest a baby of nearly ten pounds in weight. She also conveyed some concern about a patch of skin and tendon that was attached from just below the wrist of each arm and attached to the pectoral muscles on each side. Burton seemed to have a particularly large, healthy chest. Katy also reported that the middle two toes on each foot seemed to be fused and slightly bent. In addition, the baby's big toes seemed to bend outward and set slightly back from the normal position. In any event, Dr. Monroe did not feel there was any immediate concern and the slight problems noticed could be easily corrected by surgery at a later time if the Mannes felt it necessary. Katy then exited the room to go get Burton and bring him in for Jane and Austin to enjoy.

Burton was laid on Jane's chest and was swaddled in a warm blue baby blanket. His eyes immediately seemed to focus on Jane as she cuddled him against her breast. He had wide-set nearly black eyes which also appeared brown as the light angle changed and with pupils that could hardly be detected. His little nose had a slight downward hook not unlike many children of parents in other cultures. His legs seemed a little too thin and short but when he pushed himself with them it was obvious they were strong. Like many babies, his head was covered by short "fuzz," although his seemed a little stiffer than Jane had remembered other babies having. The toe and finger nails were nearly normal although a shade darker than for most babies and were somewhat conical in shape. Jane laughed and told Austin it looked like he was ready for a pedicure already. His body seemed also to be covered in soft but nearly transparent "fuzz".

Their hospital stay was one day longer than the normal two days since Dr. Monroe wanted to run several "tests" to try and explain how such a large baby could weigh so much less than expected. Blood tests however appeared normal, urine samples normal and Burton showed particularly strong arms and legs. With her concerns diminished, she wished Jane and Austin well as they departed for home. She did schedule a checkup within three months to see how Burton was doing.

Burton's First Few Years

My eyes are bright and see quite well
Changes in things that for others are still
I hear the faintest rustle of wind and air
While others cannot these senses share
And understand a puzzle to others is hard
To see a solution that could not be marred

It was pretty clear by age two that Burton was not a “typical” baby boy. While he might actually be labeled precocious he seemed particularly bright for a two year old child. He knew how to count to 100, knew on sight at least twenty different colors, could recite the alphabet and could “sound-out” the words on grocery boxes. In the store, he would call out the number posted at the entry to each aisle. He was, however, a somewhat picky eater. He disdained cereals and preferred ham, eggs, liver and other meat products. What most amazed his parents was his incredible sight for distant objects. He would accompany Jane and Austin in their falconry hobby and tell them where the bird would find its prey even before Joey or Chloe had spotted one. One day Austin took him fishing with several buddies and Burton could tell them where the fish were even though it was impossible for them to see anything in the water.

Burton was also beginning to show heightened agility in games. Austin had set up a small basketball hoop on the top of a door for Burton to throw small balls through. He could accurately sink baskets from across the room and jump and dunk them like a pro. While his legs remained considerably shorter and thinner than other boys his age, he was able to leap much higher than the other children his age with whom he played.

When he began school he was tested and immediately placed in a group especially designed for gifted children. In that setting he could pursue individualized learning and his recess time allowed him to interact with children older than himself. His classroom was equipped with laptop computers and he quickly found Internet sites like Kahn's Academy from which he could study a wide variety of subjects not available in the typical classroom setting.

When he played with other children at recess, he stood out in basketball and track events like high jump and hurdles. He did not go unnoticed by the young girls. One in particular that was called Fran, although her real name was Francesca, followed Burton around the playground. Burton was also attracted to Fran and they often played with each other.

Austin and Jane felt that Burton should know the history of how they had met and become a family. The following is their story.

The Beginning

*Life is full of challenges and gifts
Yet we often know not at any time
Which way our life drifts
And our life will be sublime*

The Last Game

My mother recounts how she and my father were first connected and how their love blossomed. Here is a recount of some major events in their lives.

Jane, sitting next to her best friend Tracy in the bleacher second row whispered “Tracy, I’m really worried about Austin. This is his last game before he graduates and he doesn’t want it to be a losing game.”

“Oh crap, Jane. With the score 7 to 6 against us and only a minute left on the clock with us 40 yards from the goal, it looks like sh.. Doesn’t it?”

“Yeah, but Austin has been in this situation before. I can tell he is sweating because he keeps wiping his brow and rubbing his hands on his butt. He knows as a wide receiver, their only chance is a pass to him or Jim, the other wide receiver. What do you think they will do?”

“It beats the crap out of me Tracy. The way they are lined up for this fourth down, it looks like they will try a field goal. But their punter Dan has never kicked 40 yards in anything but a practice session. Austin’s friend Don Johnson will receive the ball and set it up for the punt but I have a suspicion something else is planned.”

On the field, Austin has taken his position to the left on the line of scrimmage as a wide receiver. He mutters to himself “this has got to work. I can’t let this be my last game

before graduation and see us lose 7 to 6. I've got to catch that damn ball or I'll disappoint everyone."

Austin hears the call and the ball snapped to Don who quickly places it for a punt by Dan. The defensive line quickly pulls back in anticipation of the kick but Don instead falls back with both the center and the punter moving quickly in front of Don to block while Don spots a wide receiver to catch a pass. Both are being guarded by a defensive cornerback. Don has no choice and throws a high spiral in the direction of Austin just as he is tackled by a defensive tackle. Austin is running fast toward the goal line pursued by the cornerback. As he approaches the goal line he sees the ball hurtling in the air nearly a foot and a half above the position he will be in within a split second. The cornerback is already leaping in the air to intercept the ball. Austin also leaps as hard as he can and snags the ball with two fingers. The ball bounced up and then back down into his hand just as he is hit from behind by the cornerback who shoves Austin across the goal line. He did it!

Dan the punter has been injured in his action to protect Don Johnson to give him time to make the pass. Even though the clock still would permit an attempt at an extra point, there was little likelihood that Dan could recover to the point that he could kick for the extra point. In fact, there was every indication he might have suffered a concussion while defending Don. In any event, the paramedics were now carrying Dan off the field where there was an ambulance in wait. The referee was informed they would decline the attempt for the extra point. The time clock had less than 3 seconds and the other team knew that there was not enough time to even attempt to make another touchdown. They graciously conceded the game was over.

The Celebration

*Success is so sweet when it comes
We are glad and happy to be alive
Happiness inspires us to beat drums
And praise our good fortune to survive*

The crowd was in frenzy. Jane and Tracy were hugging each other screaming and giggling like a couple of grade school kids. Austin was just standing in the end of the field with a shit-eating grin and glazed eyes. He could hardly believe his luck. Suddenly Don was there with the rest of the team and they hoisted Austin to their shoulders and paraded him down the field. “You lucky son-of-a-bitch”, Don chortled. “And you finally learned how to throw a ball”, Austin responded. And then he spotted Jane struggling to get through the crowd and down on the field. He climbed down off the shoulders of his team mates and ran to the sidelines to meet her.

As they met Jane threw herself onto Austin. “Hey Austin, you really ARE my hero.” For a moment they just stood there in an embrace with tears running down both their cheeks.

“Hey sweetheart, I’ve got to go check on Dan’s condition, take a shower and get cleaned up. Will you meet me at the ‘library’ in about an hour?”

“The way you smell right now, of course I will. And give my love to Danny for me and let him know we are all really proud of him.”

“I will and don’t have too many drinks before I get there because I have something important to ask you when I get there.”

With that, Austin ran off to the ambulance to check on Dan. He was elated to see that Dan was conscious and asked “Hey man, how’s it hanging?”

“To tell you the truth Austin, I don’t even remember what hit me. All I can remember is a lot of yelling, shouting and happy faces when I woke up. And would you believe it? No broken bones either.”

“Well I always knew you were hard-headed. But seriously, I knew this was a dangerous play for you and I feel bad for having put you in that situation but we couldn’t see any alternative if we were to have a chance of winning.”

“Hey man, you know I would have made the same choice and was glad I could be a part of it.”

“Well, they treated me and Don as if we were heroes but in fact, my friend, YOU are the real hero of this game and don’t you ever forget it!”

“Hey bro, Tracy has already informed me of that! And don’t think you are going to get out of buying a couple of rounds for me tonight at the ‘library’. After I rest up a bit I’m going to need some don’t you think?”

“Do you mean alcohol or Tracy?” Austin teased.

The ‘Library’

As on other campuses, the ‘Library’ is a favorite bar in campus town for college students old enough to purchase alcoholic beverages. It is a special place for both Austin and Jane who were first introduced to each other by their common friend Don Johnson. It seems Don had taken a course in contemporary dancing at the insistence of his girlfriend Katy and had met Jane in that course. The attraction of Jane and Austin to each other was immediate. Jane didn’t even know that Austin was a football player in addition to majoring in business and Austin didn’t know that Jane was not only a major in music

but a lead dancer in a local opera company. What they did know was that the physical, intellectual and personality attractions they had for each other were a bond that would never be broken.

Jane and her friends arrived early, about seven in the evening. It was nearly an hour later when the whole football team burst through the doors with hoots and hollers of victory. Jane and Austin spotted each other almost immediately and Austin made his way to the table that Jane had reserved for them.

“I began to wonder if I’d been stood up” she chortled.

“No way, this is one evening I wouldn’t miss for the life of me. I have some very important business to take care of.” he said with a sly grin.

“And what would that be big hero man?”

With a smile on his face, Austin moved his chair back, got down on one knee and said “Jane Murphy, will you do me the honor of marrying me?”

Jane was overwhelmed and with tears in her eyes gently took Austin’s hand and brought him upright and said “You nut, don’t you know I’ve been hoping for two years that you would ask me to marry you. Of course my answer is yes.”

“Jane, I really love you with all of my heart and soul and I have known for years we were meant for each other. Can I announce our engagement to our gang of friends here?”

“Hey, if you don’t I sure as hell will.”

Austin turned and with a loud, booming voice he demanded everyone give him attention. When the room grew silent, he slipped a box from his trousers, opened it, took Jane’s hand and announced while he slipped an engagement ring on her finger, “My

friends, Jane has accepted my proposal for marriage and I want to share my good fortune with all of you. Drinks are on me tonight.”

A roar went up from the crowd and dozens gathered around the two with hugs and congratulations. Don shouted out with a grin, “Jane, Austin, you’ve got to be kidding! When is your next book coming out?”

Austin quickly replied, “Well Pride and Prejudice and Sense and Sensibility have already been taken so I guess it will have to be Love Forever.”

With that there was laughter and shouting hear, hear? Jane was now giggling uncontrollably and hugging her friend Tracy who exclaimed “You are such a beautiful couple and I can’t wait to see you married. Graduation next week will be a special celebration for us all.”

Graduation

Graduation at N. Mandela University in Huntington, West Virginia is like most college graduation ceremonies. Students are grouped by their respective colleges and the deans of those colleges award the degrees as students march across the stage. Following the handing out of diplomas, a keynote speaker congratulates the graduates and gives what he or she hopes is an inspirational speech. This year, an additional speaker was added after the keynote address. It was given by the student recently elected as class president, one Austin Manne:

“Dear fellow graduates, esteemed President and Deans of Mandela University and our celebrated keynote speaker: As you know, in the recent past this university suffered the loss of nearly the entire football team in a tragic airplane accident. In recent years,

we have had the good fortune of regaining our status with the NCAA and have begun to establish a respectable sports reputation. Our efforts in the sports arena have been inspired by the academic excellence we have been honored to receive at this historic university. I have had the good fortune of receiving both excellent academic instruction and the opportunity to participate in sports as well as meet my future wife. We all thank the faculty and staff for the blessings you have bestowed upon us. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.”

Following this short address by Austin, temporary pandemonium occurred with mortar boards thrown into the air, a deafening shout of joy from all graduates and visitors and kissing and hugging with whoever was standing close to each other. Austin’s parents were crying and shouting bravo son. Jane’s parents were also crying and screaming “hear and yeah man”. In all, it was a wonderful graduation.

Approaching Puberty

A chilling wind blew through my soul
And from my being took its toll
While passing a mirror I did see
What a monster that I could be
Was I really a bird or deformed man
Others from fear would want to ban
I shuddered at that image in the mirror
An image so bad that even I could fear
Why would a God create such a Thing
A monster of such and not a being!

As Burton approached his thirteenth birthday, he and his parents began to notice significant changes in his appearance. The downy soft hair that covered his body was becoming longer and stiffer and appeared more like small feathers. While he had been fitted with special tennis shoes to this point due to his large toes sticking out to the side, it was clear that they now seemed to be migrating further back on his feet while his heels grew smaller and smaller. The four toes on each foot were now fusing into three long “talons” with sharp toe nails that were conical in shape and sharp. His legs became bare of hair and instead were becoming covered with scaly patches not unlike someone with a serious case of psoriasis. His posture was also changing as he walked. He seemed to be bent forward more as if he were an old man with a back that had weakened with age. His back however seemed to be getting longer.

The most frightening change that occurred over approximately a year and a half was that his face was undergoing a rather radical reshaping. His upper lip had all but disappeared and merged with his nose which was now more “beak” shaped, hard and becoming a yellowish color. He was clearly metamorphosing into a large hawk-like bird!

Austin and Jane were clearly alarmed by the changes and had taken Burton to see Dr. Monroe about eight years ago with their concerns. A DNA test was performed and to the horror of both parents and physician they discovered that one of Jane's ovaries contained both human and remnants of eagle genetic material. With repeated DNA sampling each year it became obvious that the Eagle genetic material was merging with the corresponding sites in the human portion of Burt's DNA. Attempts were made to infuse stem cells from Jane's bone marrow to counteract the effects of the eagle DNA but were unsuccessful in making the changes. A DNA analysis was performed on both Jane and Austin and it was following these analyses that it was discovered that Jane's ovary DNA also had attached to DNA strands of Austin's eagle Joey. Jane's body DNA had not however been overtaken by the eagle DNA and it was only her ovarian eggs from one ovary that were a "carrier" for the eagle material. It appeared there was nothing that could stop the changes taking place in Burton.

Burt's school experiences also changed significantly. Other children avoided him and taunted him with "look at the Bird Man." A group of older boys at school would stand back and throw rocks at Burt. They kept their distance however because they knew how strong and fast Burt was. Only his friend Fran would still talk with him and express her sorrow at what was happening to Burton. At one point she put her arm around Burt and said "Oh, Burt, please don't feel bad about the changes that are happening to you. To me you are like a caterpillar that is changing into a beautiful butterfly." Burt hugged her and said "Thank you Fran but I don't want to embarrass you around the other kids." She responded with "Oh don't pay any attention to them. They make fun of me too because I don't have nice clothes to wear and have to shower in the gym to be clean every day.

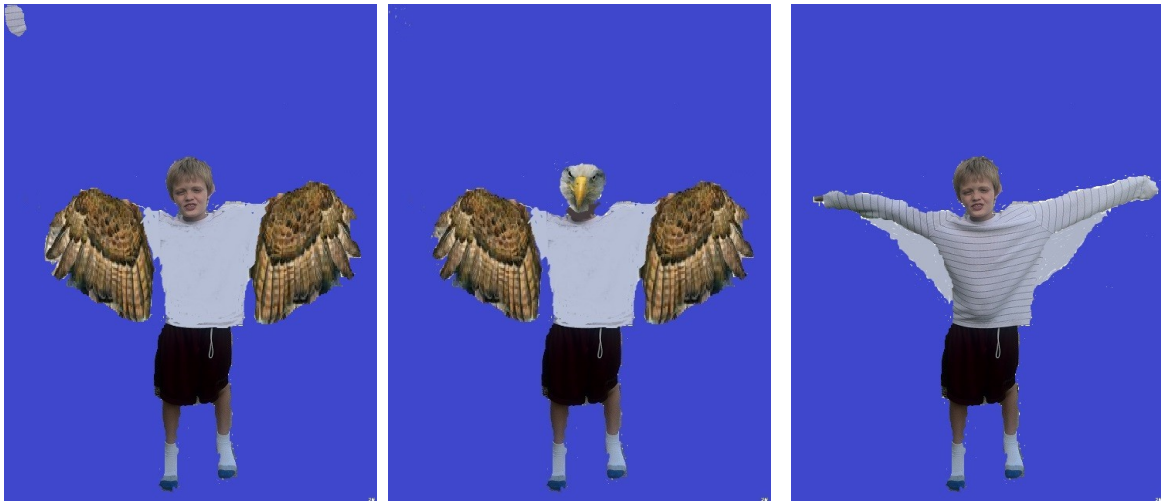
They know my mother left my Dad and me because of his drinking, swearing and threats. Mom got a job in a hotel for her room and board but they won't let her bring me to live with her. She tries to see me sometimes after school but only for a short visit because she knows I have to get home and fix Dad his supper." Burt responded with "Hey Fran, to me you are the most beautiful girl in this school and I will do anything and everything to protect you."

While most of the teachers were sympathetic to Burt's dilemma, two of them seemed to be disgusted by his appearance and strongly suggested that he should be home-schooled and not around 'normal' children. They even called Jane and Austin and told them to take him out of public school.

Burt was however getting stronger as he matured. He could now spread his arms and virtually fly over the high jumps in his gym classes. The tendons and tissue between his elbows and waist line were now becoming covered with fine feathers and he was approaching the ability to fly. The hair on the top of his head was now clearly white feathers.

Jane could see the embarrassment in Burton's eyes and began designing special clothing for him. She made short trousers that covered his "private" parts which, at this point were partially covered with feathers. The top she made was a sleeveless shirt that hid most of the feathers growing down his back and chest. Still, it was clear that he would become more and more bird-like in the months to come. His upper teeth had risen and now formed a rigid ring of hard tissue in the area beneath his nose-beak. The lower teeth also lowered and were now part of his pointed and yellowing chin. In spite of these

changes, Burt maintained dexterity with the tips of his fingers and could use the computer to explore and write email letters to Fran that she could read on the school computers. After a meeting with the school personnel, it was clear that they did not want a “freak” attending their school and were afraid that Burton was becoming dangerous to the other students due to his strength and the bullying he was getting from other students. Jane and Austin agreed to withdraw him from school and arrange private instruction. It was becoming more difficult for Burt to use a keyboard to explore instructional topics on the Internet but with the use of a mouse and screen keyboard software, he was able to spend hours in self instruction. His interest and knowledge of weather, trees, geography and animal life consumed a large part of his self-instruction. He also spent several hours each day in exercise and within a year was able to actually fly short distances, typically up to



twenty yards. He spent considerable time with Joey and Chloe. They would sit and look at each other and make head movements that were expressive and seemed to be a form of approval and communication.

Young Adulthood

When young, a personal identity you seek
To be feared, liked or friends with others
And at all cost not be considered a freak
And feel that other young men are brothers

As Burt approached his sixteenth birthday, his transformation was nearly complete. He now had fully developed and powerful wings and could leap into the air and fly easily for twenty minutes or more if there were air currents to ride. Unfortunately, he had not yet mastered all of the movements of flight – especially landing. Once while flying a short distance he flew directly into a tree because he had not mastered the use of his tail feathers and use of his wings to brake his forward momentum. “Ouch he yelled. Damn, that really hurts.” It was after that he began to study Joey and Chloe to see how they landed, especially on a tree limb. He even wondered if he should borrow his dad’s old football helmet to protect his head. “Nah, it would be too heavy and it would stay on anyway.” He would also open the cages of Joey and Chloe and fly with them as they searched for prey. While Burt’s voice now crackled when he spoke to Jane and Austin, it was clear that he still felt human in his heart and loved his parents. He went through stages of feeling sad about his changes and yet was also thrilled about his capabilities. It was also clear that he felt no animosity toward those that had teased him in school and could even laugh that, he also, would probably have done the same. In fact, Burt was developing a value system that seemed more and more protective of humans, particularly those who had the misfortune of experiencing poverty, brutality by others, lost or just lonely. Sometimes he would fly far above a

school and, with his extremely keen vision, see some children being abused by others, some sitting alone far from others during recess and some children actually begging others for snacks and food. These scenes drew tears to his eyes and he vowed that he would become the protector of those unfortunate children.

One day he was amazed to see Fran going to school. While he had never thought of her as being one of those unfortunate children, he now could see clearly that she was not dressed as nicely as the other girls, was always alone when coming or going from school and that other children avoided her. He was able to follow her trip home from high above her. He was shocked to see how she was living. Her home was a dilapidated trailer surrounded by junked cars and machines. On repeated observations, he would sometimes see an obviously drunk man stumble into the trailer and could hear him swearing at Fran who typically ran out crying. He saw no sign of a mother. One day after school he saw the drunken man slap Fran so hard she stumbled back and fell. Burt was so enraged that he went into a steep dive and with his talons spread wide, landed hard on the man, digging the talons deep into his shoulders. As the man fell to the ground, writhing in pain, Burt whispered in his ear that if he ever struck Fran again he would return and pluck out his eyes and tear off his arms and legs. Before the man could even see what had attacked him, Burt leaped into the air and was gone out of sight. That night he received an email from Fran thanking him for his intervention and indicated her father was no longer drinking and had vowed to never drink again.

What young person hasn't dreamed of flying? The exhilaration of floating high in the air and being able to look down and see the world beneath your wings is an experience that cannot even be described. And with eyes able to see even ants crawling

on the ground from hundreds of feet in the air or ears that can hear the slightest breeze is a real blast. To fly in a formation with other creatures with which you can communicate by the slightest gesture of your head or limbs is a breath-taking experience. Burt was now clearly in love with his new capabilities.

An Encounter With Scientists And Military Snooping

It was at his last visit to see Burt's doctor that Austin, Jane and Burt became most frightened for Burt. When they entered the clinic, they saw Dr. Monroe standing back with a pale expression on her face. In front of her were three men. Two of them were wearing white medical gowns while a third was in military dress. The first man introduced himself as Dr. Kurtz and his companions as Dr. Simmons and Lieutenant James. Dr. Kurtz spoke "Mr. and Mrs. Mann, we have examined the medical records here of Burton and feel we must insist that he be further studied in one of our federal laboratories. We want to know as much as possible about his DNA and the changes it has produced. We think that it may be possible to produce other people like him and I am sure you can see the possibilities of national defense with the capabilities that young Burton has shown here. We have already arranged for his transportation to a federal laboratory where he can be studied. We should be able to return him within 6 months or so."

The reaction of the Mann family was immediate. Austin's face grew bright red and his fists were tightly clenched as if he were about to tackle an opponent on the football field. Jane's face grew pale and looked as if she were about to faint and she moved behind Austin. Burt could be heard giving a low hiss and he crouched low as if to fly away at any moment. Finally, Austin gained control over his anger and in a loud and

slow sentence said “There is no way in hell that I would let you take our son to be prodded and poked for your insane curiosity and use him to clone others for some sick military purpose.” Kurtz again spoke “I’m sorry you feel that way but I’m afraid you have no choice in the matter – we see this as an important national defense activity and have high government approval to take the youngster into custody immediately.”

Hearing this, Burt burst across the room to a window, threw it open and leaped while tearing off his clothing. Within seconds he was in the air and could not be seen. Austin now shouted profanities at the three men and screamed that they would never touch Burt over his dead body. He and Jane left the room rapidly, got in their car and drove away. Dr. Monroe spoke to the three men: “I told you this was a bad idea and that you had no right to subpoena our records and violate patient rights. I’ve already asked the medical board to file suit against the three of you.” At that point, Dr. Monroe walked out of the room leaving the three men scratching their heads and muttering to each other.

The Nest

Danger and embarrassment became my life
And a need to protect self and others from strife
It was clear that I needed to be safely away
Yet be there when needed and not simply stray

Burt was already aware that his presence was becoming a problem and a danger for his parents Jane and Austin. They could no longer invite friends over for an evening or take Burt with them in public. They seemed to be becoming more and more isolated and appeared sad. Burt knew he had to do something and did not want them to feel guilty or sad. One evening he had already discussed his situation with them and laid out his plans to live somewhere else where he could feel at home with others like himself. He told his parents he was dreaming of building a large “nest” high above on a ridge where he could see his home, his school and even Front Royal from the air. This idea caught Austin’s interest and together they began to design a home that would accommodate not only Burt but his bird friends Joey and Chloe with whom he now spent considerable time. They scoured maps for an ideal place and decided that High Knob was the ideal place. They considered alternative ways to build what appeared outwardly as a very large eagle’s nest yet would be strong, durable and comfortable. They decided to create a two-layered structure using reinforced concrete in the shape of a nest and cover it with sticks, leaves and dried mud to give it an authentic nest appearance.

Following his escape from the clinic and the altercation with the scientists and military personnel, Burt flew to the High Knob site and perched on a branch so he could think and come up with some strategy. Austin and Jane also knew it was not safe to

return home at this time and intuitively guessed where Burt had gone. Within an hour they were all with each other and began making plans. Jane and Austin would stay with several of Austin's football friends until it appeared safe to return to their home. They knew that Burt could go to the house and release Joey and Chloe to stay with him on High Knob. Burt had a cell phone he could use to communicate with his parents. It was only two days and the plans to build a permanent home for Burt, Joey and Chloe were completed and the necessary materials purchased.

The actual construction was a daunting task. They had to work surreptitiously at night with Austin hauling the building materials up the hill while Burt would fly with pieces high up into a large tree sturdy enough to hold the nest. It required selecting branches that were strong, tying boards with wire to the limbs to form a platform for the nest, and assembling curved sections of fiberglass and attaching them to the nest frame. Each evening before sunrise Burt had to block the underside of the construction with boughs so that their work would go undetected the next day. Small curved steel rods were laid inside the curved fiberglass section and a thin layer of mortar carefully covered the rods. Three separate entries were constructed, one at the top for Joey, a second area for Chloe and a larger one in the lowest section for Burt. Burt's entry had to swing open and be able to be pulled shut after entering. This construction process continued for nearly three months before it was finally completed. Burt and Austin were very proud of their accomplishment. Austin took many pictures to share with Jane and knew they had completed a fantastic piece of architecture. He was careful to delete the pictures from his cell phone after sharing them with Jane.

This nest became the home for Burt, Joey and Chloe six days a week. On Sundays, they would fly to the Manne home to spend time with Jane and Austin. Burt stayed inside where he could not be seen by others while Joey and Chloe spent an hour in falconry with their owners. At noon they all shared a meal inside. It was during one of these noon lunches that Austin turned to Burt and spoke “Son, I know this change in your body has been traumatic for all of us but I’m sure especially for you. But I have to ask, do you have any plans or dreams you want to pursue?”

After a long pause, Burt nodded his head and replied “I’m afraid this will sound crazy Dad, but I actually have gotten over the shock of the changes to me and, in fact, being able to fly has given me a tremendous lift in spirits and a feeling of being free. From high above Dad, you can see things you could never imagine. One thing I have become painfully aware of is how many children are being mistreated by a parent, older sibling or other neighboring kids. I think my life goal will be to protect as many of those kids as I can. Do you think that is crazy?”

“No Son. That is not at all crazy but brave, wonderful and of course somewhat dangerous.”

“I’ve already had one experience in which I was able to keep Fran safe from her drunken father. It felt really good and convinced me that this is how I should spend my time. My keen eyesight and ability to cover a large distance quickly gives me an advantage over police or welfare officers.”

Jane added “But Burt, you have to be very careful. People will see you as a huge bird of prey and not hesitate to try and shoot you. You will have to be extremely careful to avoid situations where there might be guns or be seen flying by hunters.”

“Don’t worry Mom. I keep track of many hunters already. I know the time of day they hunt, where they hunt, and what they are trying to shoot. Joey and Chloe also help me spot them as well as other dangers.”

Austin added “And I want you to use your cell phone to call the police when you see a situation too dangerous for you to handle yourself. OK?”

“All right Dad. But you know with the way my voice crackles it may be hard for them to understand me. I might have to ‘text’ messages to them.”

“Or call us and let us transmit the message for you.”

“That sounds great and I’m so glad you support me in this choice of ‘occupation’.”

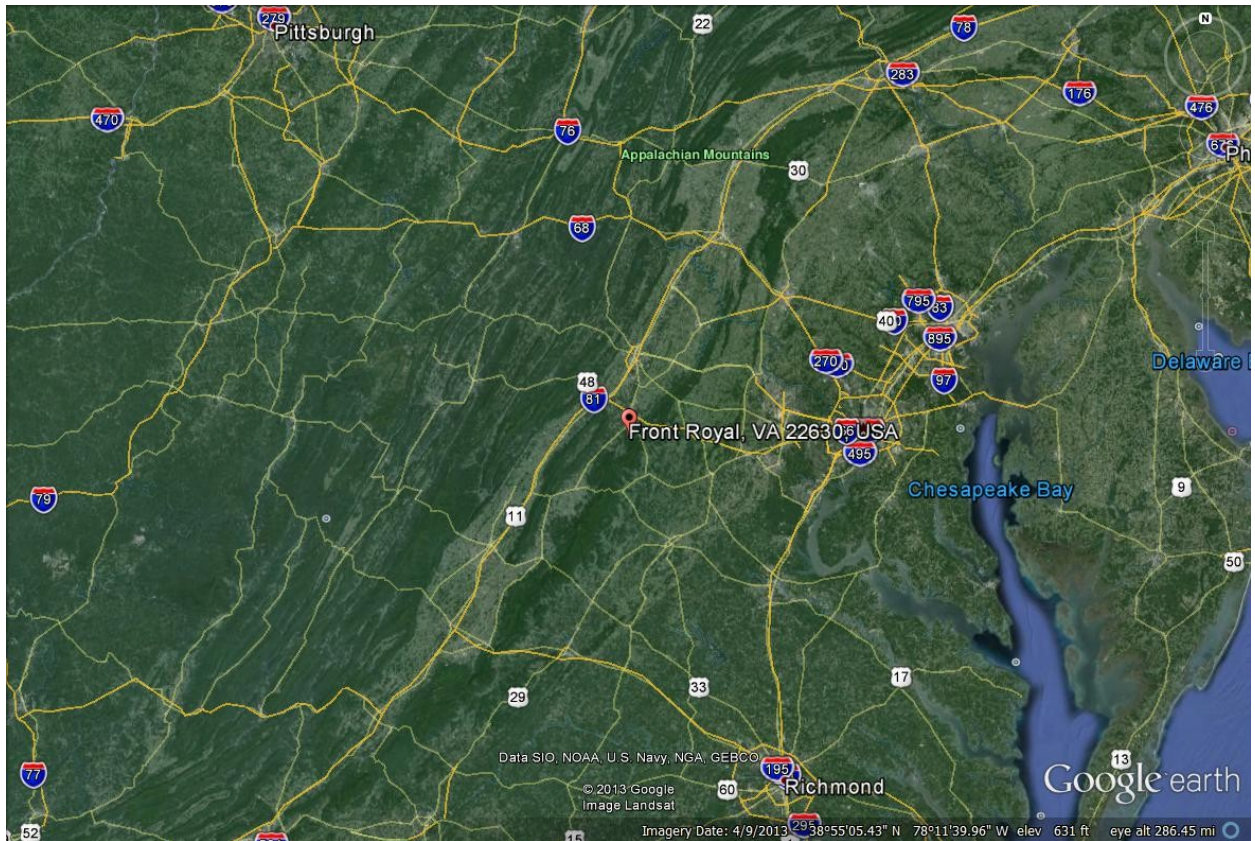
The Guardian

Am I arrogant to think I can protect others?
Perhaps it would be better to simply fly away
And maybe enjoy life and all that it covers
In a place safe where I can savor each day

Burt now felt a sense of confidence in himself he had never experienced. He knew his job would be dangerous and difficult but also that he had to do it – it was his calling. He would coordinate with Joey and Chloe as they scanned for the potential abuse or risks to children as well as any dangers that might threaten the success of their missions.

Burt was also aware that both Joey and Chloe were rapidly reaching the age where they must find mates and start their own families. The nest that he and his father had built was large enough for each to have a mate and raise young. So while they were surveying the Front Royal area for problems, they were also keeping their eyes open for possible mates in the area.

Burt's strategy to complete his mission was to coordinate his 'spotting' from the air with personnel from local police departments, fire departments, hospitals, social workers, and national forest personnel. Burt entered the names of an individual from each agency into his cell phone which he carried, even while in flight, on a band under the feathers of his waist. A small leather pouch suspended to a loop of cording around his waist held his phone. Within a few seconds he could land in a nearby tree and peck out a text-message to a recipient.



Because of the threat of being captured by military scientists still existed, Burt was careful to never make calls from his nesting area. He created a map of the area and carefully chose random spots from which to make calls so that any attempt to ‘triangulate’ on his position would always change. Burt’s dad, Austin, also worked out a simply “cryptology” for communication with himself and Jane. They created text abbreviations that only they would know such as:

1. MM = meet me
2. FB1 = Austin’s football friend one, etc.
3. H = house
4. F = field
5. D = danger or dangerous
6. L = love

7. J = Joey
8. C = Chloe
9. @ = at
10. ? = can you

etc., etc.. Messages had a strange appearance at first. For example, if Burt wanted to meet his parents at Don Johnson's house about 8:00 P.M., he would text "? MMFB1H.LB?". This code was not only helpful in reducing texting time but provided extra safety in communication with his parents. Burt also worked out a similar scheme to communicate with his best friend Fran.

Burt continued to maintain that friendship via his cell phone and secret meetings. By this means he learned that Fran's situation had improved a great deal. After Burt's attack of her dad for slapping her, her dad had sobered up, gotten a job at a local lumber yard, and allowed Fran to have more contact with her mother. Her mother had gotten a promotion to be head housekeeper at the hotel where she worked, could have Fran stay with her for a few days, and could now afford to buy Fran some nice clothing. Her parents were even talking with each other again and exploring the possibility of reconciliation. Jane now refers to Burt as her 'special butterfly'. Burt refers to her as his 'sister love'. It is clear that they have a special relationship which is more than a sister and brother relationship but never a boyfriend/girlfriend since both recognized the futility of a stronger relationship. Fran had even obtained a scholarship to attend a nearby college where she planned to major in biochemistry. She hoped after that to enter medical school and eventually do research on DNA. She secretly hoped that she might find a way to reverse Burt's changes and help him regain a total human appearance again.

An Encounter With Prejudice

Like many other states, Virginia has a rich mixture of individuals of varying background. Some are recent immigrants from South America, Africa, and other countries around the world.

Some are Native American Indians and others are poor mountain people. Because of its proximity to Washington D.C., it also varies widely in the family incomes and properties. There are million dollar horse ranches, huge grape vineyards, and lavish homes. There are also 'ghettos' where little English is spoken, large families live in poverty and few jobs available. Burt often sees potential problems arise in the towns where the schools share many of these populations. It was not unusual for him to see one or two youngsters who had not yet mastered the English language and who were obviously from a poor family being bullied by one or more children from a wealthier situation. Today was one of those days. Burt was flying over the city of Front Royal when he spotted a group of young men in an alley. They were screaming insults at a young man and throwing rocks at him. He could make out the screams and pleas of the young man in the Spanish language and could see by his appearance he wore tattered shirt and trousers that were too large for his build.

Burt dived toward the group and selected one of the larger young men that were taunting the young immigrant. He unfurled his talons as he struck the offender with one leg on each shoulder. The offender hit the ground hard and screamed with pain. The others in the group ran as fast as they could from the area before they too could be attacked. Burt then spoke to the young immigrant using the little Spanish he had been

learning on his own. “Don’t be afraid. I am your friend.” And with that, Burt sprang into the air and was far away in a few seconds.

A Falling Rock Climber

Burt often would fly along the Appalachian Trail from the entrance near highway 55 along the many trails and roads through the mountain areas. He spotted a group of 6 young people with ropes and climbing gear near one of the sheer cliffs along the trail. It was clear that there was no park ranger with them for a supervised climb and they were illegally gathered at that point. Burt had witnessed rocks tumbling loose from that area in the past and had informed the rangers when the trail was blocked by debris. He noticed one young woman had scaled about half way up the cliff when it was clear that her pylons were pulling loose and rocks were about to cascade down on her. Burt made a quick bank in his flight and flew with great speed toward the luckless girl. He swept up from below her, grabbed her waist band with his talons and while pulling her away from the cliff, strained to hold her weight while he gently lowered her to the ground. Her companions were already scattering as rocks began to tumble from the cliff. Burt released her and flew upward. He dialed the rangers on his cell phone and informed them about the interlopers and the blockage in the pass. The young woman he had saved while still startled and shaken had the presence of mind to realize what had happened and threw Burt a kiss! Burt flapped his wings to signify he understood and did a couple of fancy rolls for her before he left the scene.

Fire!

The Blue Ridge Mountains are covered by thick brush and trees. Occasionally, a pile of brush may form and become compressed by its own weight. In the summer heat and direct sunlight on the pile, spontaneous combustion can occur. Sometimes a careless person will throw a cigarette butt out a window and ignite the brush. Today, however, it was a natural occurrence that started a pile smoldering and would soon break out into a raging fire.

Burt spotted the smoldering brush from the heavy smoke billowing up from the pile. He immediately phoned the fire patrol rangers and sent a text message of the location. Precious moments passed and by the time the firefighters arrived, the pile had burst into flames. The ranger crew called in for a helicopter to dump fire retardant fog on the growing inferno. It took nearly two hours of constant work by the rangers to extinguish the flames and embers. A major catastrophe was averted.

Intermission

*Estranged from family and friends
And living a life few dare to believe
I struggle my human and eagle to blend
And my mind and myself to not deceive*

If you are still with me dear reader, hopefully the above chronicle of my life carefully preserved by others has given you some insight into my bizarre life. I'm afraid at this point the following text is solely my own chronicle of experiences I have endured. I have created a journal that is recorded automatically when I dial a secret number and enter text. Text entry itself is increasingly difficult as I often have to peck the message with my beak. If and when my earthly journey is over, the recorded text will be released for your perusal. Hopefully, you will have enjoyed this trip through life with me.

Sincerely,

Burton Manne

Joey's Death

*There are some instances in one's life
The horror of which cannot be hidden
And tears the heart with sudden strife
With anger that cannot be forbidden.*

It was a hazy day with the mountains covered with thick gauze of clouds. A stiff breeze blew down the mountain side and created an updraft on the other side. Joey, Chloe and Burt used these updrafts to gain altitude and spiral around and around the area. Their vision was partially blocked by the cloud layers but they could see each other when they reached a height of about 2,000 feet above land. Joey had just reached the edge of an updraft and began soaring down in a spiral to regain the upward flow of air. It was then that Burt heard the shot!

Within seconds Burt and Chloe heard two more bursts of gun fire. As by instinct, they assumed someone was firing at them even though they could not see clearly through the clouds. Immediately they began to circle wider and wider as they flew low enough to see who was shooting at them. They soon saw a large white house with balconies on the front and back. A man was standing on one of the porches which had hand rails on the porch. On the ground below him, only 20 feet from his house there lay three dead birds. Two were clearly black vultures – an endangered bird in the state of Virginia. Also lying dead was one of Burt's biological fathers – Joey. They could see many bird droppings on the porch from which the man was firing. It was clear that black vultures had been roosting on the porch rails multiple times. As many homeowners can testify, the vultures can be a great nuisance and do considerable damage to a home. Defending against them can require costly installation of spiked boards on top of areas where they roost.

Burt was devastated. Joey was one of his biological fathers with whom he was closely bonded from his earliest childhood to the present. He had forgotten how to cry but as he screamed he could feel his eyes dripping hot tears down his face. He and Chloe landed on the branch of a tree far enough away for safety but, with their keen eyes could clearly see the holocaust next to the house. It was at least fifteen minutes before Burt could calm down enough to text the police and provide a location. It took another half hour before he could pull himself together enough to text his parents and tell them of the tragedy. They continued to sit on the branch until a police officer arrived and they were sure the man had been given a citation for killing endangered birds.

Homeless in Virginia

*It is a common occurrence in many places
To convert an area for personal p
We know a mountain can have many faces
That provides scenery for many to treasure.*

High Knob had been my home with Joey and Chloe for many years. But in the name of “progress”, many changes can take place. Maybe I knew in the back of my mind that at some point our prefabricated home would be discovered and destroyed. I just had not expected it to occur so soon.

It was a beautiful spring day and Chloe and I were circling high above our home when we spotted lumberjacks near our tree and gazing up into it. Within several minutes axes were flying and wood chips scattering all around our tree. A chain saw was started and in a couple of minutes the entire tree with our home was lying on the ground. The lumberjacks then examined our home and for a moment, scratched their heads in wonderment. They then set about disassembling the structure that my father and I had labored so long to create. Perhaps they thought in had just been a tree house that some enterprising children had built. In any event, the entire structure was soon disassembled and the tree itself cut into small sections that could be hauled away. As this occurred, a large bulldozer was making a path up the mountain and knocking down smaller trees and brush as if they were twigs. Birds, rabbits, and other animals that had called this area home were scattering before this behemoth of a machine. Within two hours the whole top of High Knob was cleared. Within a few days there would be a campsite with a viewing tower constructed where our home had been.

Now Chloe and I were homeless. We found shelter in other trees in remote areas that had not yet been invaded by humans. We found a peak on one mountain where I helped Chloe to build a nest that would house her and her recently found mate. It was clear that Chloe and I would soon be parted forever as she rebuilds a new life with her mate. With this realization I felt profoundly alone and detached from all that I loved. For days I wandered aimlessly high in the sky looking for some refuge from my pain and sorrow.

In order to reconnect with those I knew, I texted messages to my parents and to Fran and told them what had transpired. I sent these messages from a site I had found on a mountain side near Linden. I heard back from both my parents and Fran. I knew my parents were upset with the news and they hoped I could find a new, safe site in which to live. My dad was now too old to assist in building a new nest and we both realized it too would be futile for it too would eventually be discovered. Fran was sympathetic but related some good news about her situation. She had been admitted to medical school to major in biological research and she was gathering a lot of information about DNA. She described in her research that a number of plant researchers were “cloning” new plant varieties by combining DNA from several sources. One researcher had even crossed firefly DNA with corn and produced a variety of corn that glowed in the dark! She also talked about research that was ongoing in the search for a cure for muscular dystrophy and that great progress was being made for halting dystrophy in one particular type. She was so hopeful that she could find a way to reverse my changes so I could again become more human and less bird-like. I thanked her profusely but also let her know I was OK

and had accepted my situation.

Imprisonment

*Do all living creatures experience pain?
Or live a life dreading things to come?
And pray that they will not be lame?
But live a life pleasantly as do some?*

Unfortunately, in my sadness and disorientation in becoming homeless, I failed to select different sites from which to text my messages. This evidently allowed the military to track my phone location and spot me while flying. It was now November and the air chilled me to the bones when I flew. I spent more time simply roosting on the branch I had selected for a temporary home in order to stay warm. Suddenly there was a helicopter overhead and a huge net dropped from it. The net had been specially designed to flare out into a large circle and engulf anything below. It completely surrounded the tree I was on. When I attempted to fly away I ran into the mesh of the net which seemed to be coated with a sticky substance. The more I attempted to free myself from it, the more entangled in it I became. Soon there were a dozen uniformed military personnel surrounding the tree and me in the net. Then I felt the sting of a dart in my chest and I fell unconscious.

I awoke in a room that was almost completely white from floor to ceiling. My arms and legs were shackled by heavy leather thongs that were anchored to the white table on which I had been laid.

I felt weak and sore and noticed a tube had been inserted in my left arm/wing. My mouth tasted terrible as they had obviously forced some foreign fluid into me. I could see a large X-ray machine positioned above me that they had obviously been using to take pictures of my internal organs and bones. There was a stench of antiseptics throughout

the room. As my eyes began to focus and move under my control, I saw a figure standing next to a desk about ten feet away. It was the Dr. Kurtz that I had first encountered years ago when my parent's had taken me in for my checkup! I could now clearly hear him talking on his cell phone to someone else. "He seems to be waking up. Should I give him another shot to sedate him? Do you need another vial of blood to experiment with before I do?" I could not make out the responses he heard on his cell phone but I was conscious enough to now understand my situation. I was sure that my parent's phones were blocked and that they had no idea where I was. There were bars on the one window in the room. Even if I could get loose I was too weak to break out through that window. For the first time I felt sheer panic. Were they going to bleed me to death and then dissect me? Could I regain enough strength to fight them off? While these thoughts were racing through my mind I noticed that Dr. Kurtz had laid his cell phone on the desk and left the room.

At that moment, a desperate plan raced through my head. If I could reach that phone, I could call Fran and let her know I had been captured and being held for experimentation. She could notify my parents who could start some action to recover me. Fortunately, they had not bound my jaw – most likely to be able to insert the foul tasting liquid into my intestines. With all the strength I could muster I stretched my neck to one of the leather straps holding an arm and was able to chew through it in a few seconds. It was then easier to roll toward the other arm and in the same manner tear it loose. The leg gauntlets were then simple and I was feeling even stronger. I leapt from the table and seized the phone and pecked Fran's number. Fortunately for me, she picked up

immediately and I then poked my message using the codes I had taught her some time ago.

I had just laid the phone back on the desk as I had found it and was perched on the desk when the dreaded Dr. Kurtz re-entered the room. He immediately panicked and turned back to retreat through the door. I sprang quickly toward him and dug my talons deep into his shoulders which dropped him to his knees. I did not hesitate at that point to quickly peck out both of his eyes and tear the jugular vein loose in his neck. With a scream and spastic jerks, he was dead within a minute. Then I heard alarm bells ringing and within seconds another dart had penetrated my chest. I fell unconscious again.

Again I awoke strapped to the table but this time with metal brackets and my beak was taped with a strap with an embedded wire. In a way, I was somewhat surprised that I was still alive. I could only hope that somehow Fran had deciphered my message and could get a trace on the location of the call. As I regained consciousness I now saw two figures, as Dr. Simmons and Lieutenant James standing next to me. They were livid with anger as their faces were bright red and they were shouting at me. “You little bastard, I can’t wait to start dissecting you!” shouted Dr. Simmons. “We’re going to drain every ounce of your blood from your murderous body before we finish you off” shouted Lieutenant James. With those words, all hope vanished and I turned my head away and closed my eyes. I began to remember the poem “Invictus” by William Ernest Henley (1849-1902) that the African leader Nelson Mandela had used to help him survive:

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.”*

Escape

*Oh my, oh my, can bonds be broken
That leads us surely to death's door
Or can there be some secret token
That sends us to some distant shore.*

Fran had indeed kept the number from which I had dialed and with the help of my parents were able to trace my whereabouts to The Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, a short distance from Washington, D.C. Within an hour my parents had contacted the Virginia State's Attorney office and obtained a release order although they knew it would be most likely blocked for "National Security" reasons by the Military. Fran was currently attending the University of Maryland's medical research program and immediately packed and started toward Bethesda. It would be her brilliance and cunning that would save me, if at all possible.

Fran was particularly eloquent when talking to the administration at the Bethesda hospital. She explained that she was deeply engrossed in the study of DNA and cloning processes such as those used to combine horses and zebras or cattle and buffalo and had heard that there was similar research being conducted at Walter Reed that she might be able to compliment with her knowledge and skills and that she wished to be at the forefront of any new research in this area. She sat patiently in the lounge reading a monograph on recent DNA research while calls were made to a number of individuals. After nearly an hour, a medical researcher in a green gown exited an elevator and approached her. Following a twenty minute discussion of her knowledge of DNA cloning and experimentation, the researcher approached the desk and obtained an identification card for Fran to wear. She was also asked to sign a form which would

forbid her to reveal anything she observed or learned while in the hospital. With that form signed, she was then escorted to the area where the research on Burton was taking place. She was met by Lieutenant James who informed her that this was an extremely dangerous area of experimentation and she should take extreme caution to protect herself from the subject of their research. Fran nodded in understanding and related to him a previous experience she had encountered while doing research in the attempted cloning of a wolf with a domestic cat. The Lieutenant then introduced her to Dr. Simmons who explained that they were attempting to clone a mutant eagle with human beings to provide the creation of people that could serve an important military service. Fran nodded her understanding and wished him success in his endeavor. She was then escorted past several military guards armed with dart guns to the room where Burton lay half conscious.

Fran maintained a somber expression as she saw my body laid on the table. I had a tube in one arm and another down my throat. My eyes flickered open and shut as if in a restless dream. Although she could feel herself trembling with outrage and grief, Fran steadfastly maintained an air of detached interest. She asked if she could more closely examine this creature and if the “good Doctor” could describe what they had found in its DNA. Simmons nodded an approval and she went to the side of the table and bent close to my head. She whispered in my ear that she was here and would try to get me out. I vaguely seemed to understand and for a moment opened my eyes enough to focus on Fran and give a chortled sound from my throat. She quickly surveyed the shackles restraining me as well as the room itself. Nonchalantly, she drifted over next to the window to examine the clipboard of information that the Dr. had given her regarding the

DNA samples. Next to the window she could see that the bars over the window were actually on a large hinge that would allow them to swing open in case of a need for an emergency exit. A simple latch held the bar cage closed.

Fran asked if it would be all right if she simply sat in the room and observed this creature for several hours. She also asked if she could see some of the X-ray pictures and if the feeding tube could be safely removed from the beak so she could get a better view of his actual structure. Simmons nodded to the Lieutenant who went and obtained the most recent pictures. After handing them to Fran, he excused himself to go and further examine the degree of success they were having in the cloning of the DNA to human DNA. Fran had also observed that there was a video camera in the corner of the room that faced the table on which I lay prone. If she were to get me out, she would have to stand over me to block the camera while she removed the tube, unfastened the restraints and quickly move me to the window.

Fran began by first removing the tube which was clearly feeding me a sedative. Suspecting there might be a medical alarm attached to the tube if it were disconnected, she quickly re-inserted the needle of the tube into the water filled mattress on which I laid. She then carefully unscrewed the restraint bolts, breaking several finger nails in the process. She left them in positions where they looked as if they were still intact. She then went back to her chair and sat in silent observation of me as she knew it would take at least fifteen minutes for me to regain sufficient consciousness to be able to respond successfully. In addition, Fran wanted the camera to be able to see both her and me as if everything was normal.

When Fran noticed my eyes were now staying open for more than 15 seconds, she again went to the side that blocked the camera and whispered her plan to me. I would have to pull myself loose from the now loosened restraints, attack her as she fled toward the window for an escape. As soon as she released the bar cage I must jump on her shoulders at the window and fly rapidly away and seek asylum as best I could. Fran then asked me to blink twice if I understood and three times if I felt I would be strong enough to fly. The adrenalin was already rushing in my veins and I signaled her I was ready. She said she would step back several feet to continue blocking the camera and then I should tear a gash in her arm while she screamed and went for the window. I nodded my understanding. With the plan in place, Fran removed the final restraint from my beak and backed up several feet.

I pulled free of the shackles and leapt at Fran. With one talon I tore an ugly two inch long and deep gap in her upper left arm. She screamed and turned quickly and ran to the window and unlatched the bar cage in a feigned attempt to escape. I leaped on her shoulders as men with dart guns quickly appeared at the door. They could not get a clean shot at me without hitting Fran which gave me the precious second to leap free of the window and plummet headfirst down the side of the building. It was clearly afternoon and the sun was bright against the building. This created an updraft from below that I was able to capture and sail rapidly up to the rooftop. It had rained the previous night and I discovered a pool of palatable water from which to quench my burning throat. I then leaped from the edge of the building to again capture the updraft and circled higher and higher. I was then able to hop-scotch to the next tall building and catch the updraft from that building. In this manner I was able to use building after building to make my way

higher and higher toward the west. Within thirty minutes I was at the outskirts of D.C. and spotted highway 66 which I knew would take me all the way to Front Royal. Because of my hydration and poor health, fatigue set in quickly and I had to stop frequently for a drink in a stream along the way and rest on the limb of a low tree. I was aware that there were jet planes flying west also and wondered if they were simply planes that protect the D.C. area or were in fact military planes trying to spot me. Whenever I could, I would join groups of hawks or vultures flying in the same general direction. The heat of the highway gave sufficient updrafts from air falling from the hillsides to keep me safely aloft. The sun was beginning to set by the time I reached the Blue Ridge Mountains where I knew I could safely take refuge in a tall tree.

I found the perfect tree in which to roost. It had two limbs that formed a circular nest next to the trunk of the tree. The leaves on the branches above and below me were large and one could not see either down or up to see me. I fell asleep quickly as night fell.

I had the suspicion that my parent's attempt with the attorney general had failed to get entry or even an acknowledgment of my presence in the hospital. This was later confirmed. I knew there was only one way now to get a message to my parents that I had escaped and, for the time being, was safe – that would be by finding Chloe and her mate and asking Chloe to take a note to my parent's home. The last time I was with Chloe, she had indicated that they had a nest along the Shenandoah River on a cliff that overlooked the river. I spent the next two days traveling up and down the river area calling for Chloe. On the evening of the second day, I heard a familiar sound from below and saw a red-tailed hawk rising in the sunset. It was Chloe! I followed her to their nest and told

her what I needed her to do. I would find some scrap paper and a burnt twig to scribble a message to my parents that she would carry back to the old cages which still stood by my parent's home. She agreed to do it the following day. In the meantime, I would stay with her mate and help guard two precious eggs that soon would hatch. I felt proud that I had at least something to do to thank her for her help. She returned that evening with a note from my parents in our usual code. They were delighted that I was free and safe and hoped we could arrange a safe meeting at some point. It was obvious that their home was under scrutiny for my possible visit there. After all, I had killed a human and that did make me an outlaw. I could no longer give any assistance to police, fire fighters, social workers or people in distress without revealing my locations and place myself in jeopardy. It certainly seemed I was now destined to live a life alone and on the run. The world as I had known it had now completely collapsed. What would become of me now?

Fran's Breakthrough

*My mind is shattered this I know
My brain no longer acts as one
And when I gaze the abyss below
I don't know from whence I come.*

The days dragged on and I aimlessly flew hither and yon. I was certain I now clearly had a split personality. One moment I would be a bird and the next moment a young man. I could no longer focus on being one or the other. My communication with others was either as a bird or a nearly incoherent human. My sadness deepened each day I lived. Flying no longer held the thrill it once had and I was withdrawing further and further from the will to live.

It had been months since my escape and scarcely any communication with humans. Then I received a written note from Chloe's clutch that had been written by Fran. She pleaded with me to meet her at a secret destination where neither of us could be observed. We would meet, of all places, in a small cave not far from Linden that was seldom visited by tourists or others. I decided to honor her wishes and on the following Tuesday, flew to that location and entered the cave about ten in the morning. What was supposed to be a cave turned out to be little more than a large dent in the side of a hill and it was clear that it had little, if any, interest to tourists. Fran was there with a broad smile on her face that seemed to light up the hole we were in. She exclaimed "I've done it Burt! I found the means for reversing your changes and I think I can restore you to the human you were meant to be."

Fran then unfurled a roll of papers filled with images of DNA protein, chemicals which would detach or reassemble protein chains, lists of multiple DNA sites affected,

and other information that made absolutely no sense to me. Her exuberance was unbridled. She described how with multiple mutants and clones she had been able to reconstruct the original DNA and encapsulate the undesired DNA molecules. “Burt – this is it! I think I can restore you to the man you were meant to be!”

But what do I want to be I thought to myself. Would I rather simply be a true eagle and fly with other eagles for the rest of my life or would I want to be earth-bound and lose my connections to the beauty I had found in nature and other creatures? Such a monumental decision would be extremely hard to make. And where would I exist when this reversal was taking place and how long would it take? Would my taste for fish and rodents change to a desire for mashed potatoes and steak? These were questions I had to have answers for before I let Fran go any further. Fortunately she had brought an electronic pad that I could peck out my questions and concerns to her. I was not surprised that she had already anticipated my quandary and had carefully planned the entire scenario for my “rehabilitation”. I would be sequestered in an abandoned log cabin in a former Native American camp site. Fran would come on alternate days with a variety of food and doses of the chemicals she had prepared for the change. The entire process would take nearly nine months and during that time, I would experience pain, anxiety and feel a need to escape. She would be sure that I was securely enclosed in the cabin and would from time to time administer drugs to minimize my discomfort. Fran also made it clear that in her experiments with laboratory animals, that there were some organs more resistant to change such as the eyes, inner ears and hair. She had also several cases where the encapsulated DNA would suddenly reattach and spontaneously change the animal to its previous state but that when stimulated electrically would again

spontaneously recover. She did not anticipate this would be the case for my DNA realignment.

I admitted to her my fears and concerns and begged her for at least another day to make my decision. When she heard that she began to cry. My feelings were still so strong for Fran that I could not bear to see her in that state of mind and I immediately gave her my consent to begin the process.

Reverse Metamorphosis

*That change is inevitable is certainly true
And we can't be certain of what is to come
Or can we appreciate where the time flew
And to understand where we came from*

I flew to the site of the cabin that Fran had identified. With fear and trepidation I first landed on the edge of the thatched roof to survey the area and potential security risks. I then hopped down to the plank doorway where I saw an unlocked padlock looped through a gate-type of hinge. The major portion of the hinge was between the door and the door jamb and could not be easily unscrewed from its mooring. I lifted the lock with my beak and pushed open the door to the cabin. Inside I could see an old stone fireplace and one small window with sturdy bars over it. Several kerosene lanterns hung on chains from the exposed beams of the ceiling. The walls consisted of dark, raw logs from which the cabin had been constructed. Packed between the logs was a sturdy pack of mud that felt as hard as cement. The floor had rough planks which had curled slightly from the moisture below them. Beneath one of the lanterns was a hand-made cot with Indian blankets on top of a feather mattress. The cloth of the mattress and blankets look to have been woven on an ancient weave. The heavy plank door that I had just entered was on sturdy hinges and took considerable effort to push shut. A slide bolt was attached to lock the door from the inside. I perched on the cot and with a sigh soon fell sound asleep. It was at least two hours past sunset that I awoke to hear a tapping at the door. With trepidation I hopped over to the door and with my beak pulled back the bolt. I was delighted to see Fran and she entered quickly, carrying a large canvas bag filled with food, chemicals and clothing. The clothing was that designed for young men of various

ages and size. I began to suspect they were here for me to wear as I progressed through changes to a more human form if things went as Fran had hoped. She could tell I was excited to see her and that I was also anxious as I flapped my arms and hopped nervously around the room. Fran sat down on the cot and patted it for me to come join her so she could show me several things from her bag. She first retrieved a packet of paper bound at the top corner with a clip. She described each of nearly twenty pages of text and drawings she had assembled to describe the stages that I would go through if the treatments were successful. I began to shiver as she talked and she gently stoked my back to help relieve my anxieties. She then talked about the changes she expected to see over the next months. Some changes may begin to appear within a few days while others would take much longer. She emphasized that I must stick to a specific diet of water and food over the period of the treatments. Fran then withdrew two large bottles of water and packets of dried food and some fresh meat. She exhorted the importance of my diet, particularly as time progressed. She would bring additional supplies every three days and would examine me thoroughly to assess the progress of the changes and insure that I was surviving these changes.

The last item she withdrew from her pack appeared to be a medical packet. It unfolded in the middle and I could see syringes, vials of chemicals, some prescription drugs, bandages and tape. With a sigh, she then informed me that her stay would be short tonight and that she would use her key to secure the outside padlock and that I was also to lock the door from the inside. Before she left she would give me two shots using the syringes she had packed. One would be given directly into the muscle on my chest and, more painfully, one half of a vial in each foot at the bottom. As she inserted the needles I

could see the pain I felt reflected in her eyes and could see she was fighting back tears as she pushed the plungers to insert the chemicals. There was an immediate burning sensation in both my chest and nearly unbearable pain in the bottom of my feet. I rolled onto my back with my feet stuck straight up in the air and flung my head from side to side in an attempt to endure the pain. Fran stroked my body from head to toes and whispered her undying love for me as we together struggled through the pain. After what had seemed like hours but was probably only about twenty minutes, the pain began to subside and I felt the urge to sleep. Fran whispered “I will be back in two days my beautiful butterfly. Drink and eat what I will lay out for you when you awaken from your sleep. Goodnight my love.”

I awoke the next morning with light gleaming through the one window which was so covered with dirt to be nearly opaque. My entire body ached and I felt sharp jabs of pain when I moved my limbs. I lay quite still for at least an hour. Then I remembered Fran’s instructions for me to drink the water and eat the food she had lain out for me next to the cot. In what I am sure appeared to be slow-motion animation, I sipped from the water bowl and nibbled away at the food. The food consisted of some shredded meat of some type and some wild berries and grapes. As I drank and ate my strength started to come back and the aching subside. I persisted in this activity for at least an hour and again felt the need to sleep.

It was clear that I had slept the entire day and again woke the next morning at day break. The aching and pain I had endured the previous two days had decreased significantly and I was now able to move about the cabin with only mild discomfort. I began to realize I was feeling somewhat cold as if there were a cold draft whirling about

the room. To warm myself, I began to flap my arms and then cover my chest with them. To my horror I saw many of my feathers flying loose as I moved my arms and could feel other feathers had fallen away from my back. Though my beak felt like it had been smashed against a stone wall, I was able to pull a section of blanket from the cot and toss it over me. I sat on the edge of the cot with a slight shiver continuing through my body. Again, I nodded asleep numerous times during the day, awakening to again eat and drink as Fran had instructed. I had not realized what an ordeal this would be and wondered if I would be able to endure it, even for Fran.

It was again dark when I heard the same tap at the door that I knew would be Fran. I struggled again to the door to unlatch it and let her enter. Upon entering she clearly gasped and her eyes were wide as if she had seen some frightful image. And clearly, I must have been a fright as I had now lost nearly all my feathers and the texture and tone of my skin had changed significantly.

Fran again hauled her large canvas bag into the room and averted looking at me as she sat the bag next to the cot. The first thing she withdrew from the bag was a small weight scale and a tape measure. She motioned to me to come and stand on the scale. I limped over to the scale with my legs aching and feeling like they were weighted down with lead. Fran took out a notebook and wrote down the date and weight – 31 pounds. She then asked me to stand against one wall and made a mark on the wall parallel to the top of my head. Again she wrote in her notepad – 3 feet and 4 inches. In a similar manner she measured the circumference of my head, the length of my arms and legs and my waist size. All measurements were similarly recorded.

Next, Fran retrieved a small mirror from her bag and held it up to my face so I could see my reflection in it. I was dumbfounded! My beak had widened and there were thin lines of skin below the upper beak and above the lower beak. My face seemed slightly wider than I remember reflections in the water. When I stuck my tongue out I could see that it had gotten wider and somewhat flatter in shape. As I scanned my image further down I could see the flesh that was strung between my wrists and waist was shrinking and my legs looked swollen with the scales now separated by patches of pink flesh.

I collapsed onto the cot and Fran encircled me with a part of the blanket. I was still dazed by what I had seen when she began to speak: “Oh Burt. It has hardly been a week and already you have made significant changes. I know you are shocked as was I because I didn’t think things would progress so quickly. One of the things I injected into you was a virus that had been modified to seek specific DNA sites and encapsulate the proteins at those sites. Using techniques I learned from the research on Cancer and neural –muscular diseases I also injected you with DNA strands I obtained from your mother’s ova that had not been infected by Joey. I met with your mother several months ago and explained to her my ongoing research projects and asked if she would permit me to gather eggs from both of her ovaries and save them in case she might want to risk another pregnancy at some time. To my delight I discovered it was the eggs in only one ovary that had been infected by eagle DNA and the eggs I harvested from the other ovary were perfectly normal. It was the DNA from those eggs that I was able to harvest to begin your change to the way you should have been. My theory is that your transformation actually took place at inception and while you were in her womb and it

was her flow of tainted blood to the womb that also affected you. We have seen similar cases such as fetal alcohol syndrome and the effects of some drugs that had been administered to mothers while they were pregnant. I am now very optimistic that my strategy for the reconstruction of your real person is moving even faster than I had originally predicted. I know this is a painful experience for you and the sudden changes you are experiencing will continue to shock us both.”

We sat huddled together on the cot for at least an hour without speaking. Finally, I turned to Fran and muttered a thank you. As I said it, I was surprised that it was no longer a rough cackle but sounded more human. She smiled and hugged me even tighter. She murmured that she must leave soon and had several more treatments to administer to me. Before she opened her medical kit to begin the injections, she also retrieved a small clock from her bag and hung it on the wall just below the window. She also unpacked a fresh supply of food that contained, for the first time, vegetables, rice and potatoes. She retrieved a large bottle of pills that contained a combination of calcium and vitamin supplements and placed it next to the food. She then loaded her syringes and administered her chemicals to my posterior and neck vein. Again, there was a burning sensation at both sites that drew tears to my eyes and I gasped for air. Fran then asked me to swallow a pill that would relieve the pain and make me sleepy. I gulped it down with a healthy swig of water. Fran again admonished me to stick to the diet that she had written out and taped to the edge of the cot. She said she would again see me in three days and quickly packed her bag and prepared to leave. Before she left she put her arms around me and whispered: “I love you Burton Manne, my beautiful butterfly” and kissed the top of my head and left quickly through the door.

The above scenarios would be repeated for weeks to come. Each week would see extraordinary changes in shape, weight and height. I suffered terrible headaches as my head size changed, more ache and pain as my original face began to reappear and painful “growing pains” as my legs, arms and trunk changed. My bones were evidently becoming less hollow and I felt heavy. I was finding it more and more difficult to find a comfortable position in which to sleep. And sleep I did for many hours during the day and night. During my waking hours I would sit like a zombie and gaze at the walls. Light filtered in through the one window where leaves on the outside trees made the light flicker in a hypnotic manner. I counted the knots on each timber of the cabin to pass the time. I examined the ashes in the old fireplace and attempted to guess what had been burned in it. I dragged some ashes from the fireplace and with a splinter of wood drew words and shapes of houses, cars and animals. I drew many birds.

The Results

*What, oh what will my future be?
Can I manage a life anew to me?
Is it even possible to predict or see?
And live a new life useful and free.*

It was only about seven and a half months before my growth ceased. I was now about five feet and ten inches tall and weighed about one hundred forty pounds. I looked, for all purposes, like a normal young man twenty years of age. I had lost some of the keen vision I once had and the urge to take to the sky and survey the world. I had paid a painful price to recover my human self. A new anxiety now permeated my thinking. Can I reconnect with my parents? Can I learn a new occupation and become a useful citizen? Will Fran still love me as a man as I admittedly do love her as a beautiful woman? Will I somehow be recognized as the previous eagle/man and again be subjected to inhuman incarceration? I finally got up the nerve to confess these concerns to Fran during our last night in the cabin. She threw her arms around me and after a long, passionate kiss on the lips she whispered “You already know how much I love you and I know how much you love me. We will be partners for life. You saved me and know I have saved you. We are inseparable.”

Fran and I began to plan my reintroduction to the world. I would adopt a new name – Charles Burton. I would be introduced to Fran’s parents who were now fully reconciled as her boyfriend whom she has known since grade school. I will seek enrollment in a college program focused on astrophysics. I will then be introduced to my parents at one of Austin’s college friend’s home. Then we can reveal to them who I really am. We will have to play it from there. We then locked the cabin after packing all

traces of our use of the space into Fran's car. We drove until nearly sunrise to the apartment where Fran lived near Bethesda. We immediately went to her bedroom and collapsed together on her bed and with a quick embrace and "good night" fell soundly asleep in our clothes.

My New Life

*Can one really be totally reborn?
Like those who accept a new faith?
And exist in a completely new form?
Replacing the former without a trace?*

I will admit there were numerous points at which I was terrified in this process of re-establishing myself as a human being. The first step was meeting Fran's parents. I suppose every young man that is in love with someone's daughter shares a similar anxiety. For me it was the fear that somehow her dad would recognize me in some way as that terrible eagle boy that sank his talons deep into his shoulders and threatened him if he were ever to hurt Fran again. I was so relieved when I was welcomed into their home and joined them for supper. Fran had taught me the necessary manners and use of the silverware that I did not look like a complete fool. Our conversation was cordial and I explained how I was new to this area and would be attending college and seeking a part time job to meet expenses. Fran's parents seemed impressed and her father even gave me a pat on the shoulder as we exited their home.

Don Johnson was Austin's best friend during their college days and they have kept their bond over the years. They often meet at one of their homes to watch TV, interact about any topic of current interest and generally enjoy their time with each other. Don was a real-estate broker and lived in Front Royal but was involved in home sales in nearly the whole state of Virginia and some in Maryland. It was at one of their family "get together" events that Jane had invited Fran to join them. Fran had maintained her friendship with Jane following the harvesting of Jane's ovary eggs. Fran asked Jane if it

would be all right if she brought her boyfriend and Jane emphatically agreed and would look forward to meeting him.

Don and Austin were grilling hamburgers on the outside grill when Fran and Charles arrived. They were greeted by Don's wife and Jane at the door. Fran politely introduced Charles Burton to both of them. But Jane was wide-eyed as she looked at Charles. She saw this handsome young man who bore a striking resemblance to her husband Austin. And the memory of her young Burt flashed through her head. How could this be? Jane was frozen in her place as Fran and Charles casually entered the house. Then Fran took Jane by the arm and whispered "can we go talk privately for a minute?" Jane murmured "yes" and led Fran to the bathroom in Don's house. Fran asked Jane to sit down on the stool cover for a minute while she began to tell the story of how she had transformed Burt back to the human form he was too have been born with. She explained that, yes, he *is* your son but to protect them all he was now going by the name Charles Burton. Jane broke into tears and said "I knew it had to be him!" Fran explained how they had applied for a new social security number on the pretense that he had not been born in a hospital and that no one had thought to register his birth. Jane tearfully hugged Fran and repeatedly whispered "Thank you, thank you over and over." Now, we have to bring Austin up to date. Do you have any suggestions of how we should do that?" Fran answered "go out and tell Austin that Charles and I have to leave now because I received an emergency call. Tell him you have invited us to come to their house tomorrow evening to spend some time with you and him say, about seven in the evening." Jane nodded in agreement and Fran exited the bathroom and went directly to

Charles and let him know they had to leave because of an emergency. Charles made a quick apology to Don's wife and left with Fran.

Fran and Charles arrived promptly at seven the next evening at Jane and Austin's home. Jane had said nothing to Austin about her conversation with Fran because she wanted to see Austin's reaction when he met Charles. Austin answered the door bell and opened the door. As soon as he saw Charles he burst into tears and wrapped his arms around Charles. *He knew instantly who he was!* "Oh dad, how I've missed you and mom for so long as he hugged Austin. Fran and I have so much to tell you and mom and how this all came to be. I also need to share my plans with you and get your input on them." With tears in all of their eyes and a prolonged group hug, they finally made their way to the large circular couch in the living room. Jane and Austin sat as close as they could to Fran and Charles and Fran was holding Charles hand tightly in hers. Then Fran gave a detailed account of the research she had done and the transformation process that she and Charles had pursued. Charles then described his struggles to regain his humanly thinking but also remembering his life as an eagle. He confessed that the transformation had been nearly complete but that his vision and hearing was still much better than others that he had met and that he still feels drawn to the sky and forest. His described his plan to enroll in college and work part time to meet expenses. He hoped he might get a part-time position with the Forest department so he could once again be close to the nature he had loved so much as an eagle.

Jane and Austin nodded their understanding and praised Charles for his planning and thinking. They could not take their eyes off of Charles and had to fight not to call him Burt. They continued to talk and hug repeatedly for several hours. Then Charles

asked if he could see the cages where Chloe and Joey were once caged. Charles had not forgotten the trauma of losing Joey and the deep affection he still has for Chloe. He told Jane and Austin about Chloe and her mate and where they had relocated. He confessed that he hoped he would have the chance to once again see Chloe and her family. It was then that Austin revealed that Chloe occasionally came “home” and visited them for a few minutes each month. She was often accompanied by her family who circled above on the updrafts until she parted.

Charles wept. There was still a chance he would see his “other love” once again.

School and Job

*Can one really live a life over again?
Does one need to loose one's prior life?
And if so, where does one begin?
To enjoy a brand new life free of strife?*

Charles completed the Scholastic Aptitude Test and was admitted to Mandela University with a major in physics. He elected a light load of required courses in English, Math, Physics 1 and Economics to leave him time to pursue a job. He completed applications for jobs with the forestry department and police department in Front Royal, Virginia. Within two weeks he had an interview with the forestry department and was told he could begin an internship for training within the next two weeks. Charles was elated and immediately notified Fran, Jane and Austin.

It was during his internship that Charles remembered reading a Greek play about Icarus who, with his father had fashioned wings out of wax and feathers to escape Crete. Charles began to imagine himself creating artificial wings and feathered “stockings” that would attach to his ankles. He would fashion gloves with extended feather fingers to wear for navigation as he once did as an eagle. He would fold up his legs to his chest after climbing a tall tree for takeoff. Since he still had a large chest with strong pectoral muscles, he could catch an updraft and be air bound again. He continued to play with this fantasy over and over while completing his internship.

In his college physics class he wrote a paper which involved calculating the forces needed by ones arms to raise a body weight of 120 pounds. His results indicated he would need a wingspan of approximately six feet and by use of feathers would need to exert nearly 200 pounds of force with his pectoral muscles. He visited the workout gym

at the school and found that he could easily pull 250 pounds of weights attached to the wall for exercise of those muscles. Of course, he would have to obtain an excellent set of feathers and carefully construct a light weight carbon-filament frame on which to mount them. He could also attach a strap around his legs below the knees and attach tail feathers that he could manipulate with small straps from his ankles. The strap would help keep his legs folded up around his chest. He decided that Velcro straps to the wings, and belt would provide quick release should he plummet into water. He decided it could be achieved!

At the end of his internship, Charles was assigned a post in the Shenandoah Nation Park on the Skyline road. From his lookout tower he had a view of nearly the whole park from Linden to Waynesboro, Virginia. He was thrilled to see eagles and hawks, among other birds such as turkey vultures riding the air currents high above. With the aid of powerful binoculars he could also spot campers and vehicles traversing the winding roads. The park is one of the best in the nation and contains camp sites, restaurants, lodging and multiple lookout sites. Charles was clearly in his element in this location! His assigned hours were split into two shifts from five to eight in the morning and from six to nine in the evening. This left little time to get to school or study for his classes. Most of his class preparation was done between classes at the school library. His weekends were also heavily scheduled with spending time with Fran, his family and new acquaintances. In spite of his heavy schedule, he made excellent grades in his courses and received praise for his work in the forest. By the end of four years he had completed the degree requirements in physics and was given additional latitude in scheduling his work in the park.

The Eagle Has Landed!

*One does not easily give up a dream,
That is burned into ones soul from birth.
It is a blueprint for life, even a theme
Like the swimmers thirst to one day surf.*

Charles is now at a turning point in his life. Multiple options are mulled over and over again. Does he continue into graduate school to pursue a career in astrophysics? Does he work full time now as a forester? Should he ask Fran to marry him and settle down for a blissful life with her? Yet, these options continue to be drowned out by his thirst to fly again. It becomes clear to him that he must finally attempt his dream of creating his flying apparatus and attempt to fly again before he can decide on his future. In the basement of his parent's home, he begins to assemble the feathers, straps, gloves and other accessories he will need for his experiment. Feathers are carefully aligned and attached with "Gorilla Glue" to hold them tight. He goes through multiple dress rehearsals in front of a mirror to check each detail. Within a month he has completed his outfit and has built up his courage for an attempt to once again fly!

Fran, Jane and Austin have been informed of his intentions. To his surprise, none of them were opposed to his plans and even assisted him in identifying a test location on the Shenandoah River. A spot was identified with a tall tree that hung out toward the river on a ledge about sixty feet up from the river basin. Several checks indicated that there were frequent updrafts at that point that would assist in getting airborne. On Saturday morning, Charles, Fran, Jane and Austin packed the flight equipment along with cameras and journeyed to the site. With his flight equipment packed on his back, Charles would shiny up the tree to an overhanging branch and put on his bird outfit. Austin

filmed the entire process complete with dialogue explaining each step in the process. Then they waited about fifteen minutes for a strong updraft to assist in the “takeoff”. Charles edged to the end of the branch, spread his six foot long artificial wings, carefully bent over with his legs tucked tight against his chest and caught the breeze. With a single flap of his wings he was airborne! The updraft sucked him up higher and higher. He quickly learned to manipulate his directions with the feathered glove finger tips and the tail feathers tethered to his ankles. The adrenalin was rushing through his veins as he circled higher and higher. He then experimented with several rolls and steep descents. His joy was beyond description. He was again an eagle! It was only ten minutes into his flight when he was joined by three hawks as he sailed effortlessly in a huge circle above the river. He knew immediately who had joined him – it was Chloe, her mate and one of her offspring’s! Charles dipped his wings in a familiar salute that they had learned years ago and saw Chloe give the same response. His dream was now a reality.

After fifteen minutes of additional sailing, Charles knew it was time to return to earth and ease the tension he knew his group must be feeling. In slow circles, he began his descent. He scanned both the river and the river shore for a place to land. A beach was visible nearly two hundred yards from where he had leapt from the tree. He steered himself toward the beach and used his wings to slow his descent and forward motion. When about ten feet from the beach he quickly detached his waist belt and extended his legs for the landing. By pumping his wings hard, he was able to gracefully land in a slow trot on the beach. Austin had moved to a new vantage point to capture the landing on his camera. Charles could hear the whoops and hollers of his group as he came to a stop. Mission accomplished!

The group packed up the gear and headed back home. Charles was still smiling from ear to ear. Fran, Jane and Austin were to the surprise of Charles, nearly silent on the trip back to the house. When they arrived, Charles took his equipment back to the basement and carefully stored it. When he returned upstairs, Austin had already attached his camera to the TV so the whole episode could be viewed. Jane filled four glasses of a merlot wine for them to drink while they watched the film. They watched the entire sequence of events with hardly a word spoken. At the end, Charles took a long drink from his wine glass, set it down, and knelt next to Fran. He reached into his pocket and drew a small square box to hold in front. He said “My dearest Fran. You have given me a new life. You have let me fulfill many dreams. I am now begging you to be my wife and share our journeys forever and ever.” Fran’s response was a tearful “Of course I will marry you my butterfly. But there is only one condition – no more flying.” Charles laughed as he said “Yes, yes my love. I just had to experience it once more. You are the one that now gives me flight. I want to be tethered to you for life.” Then they all burst into laughter and with a toast with their glasses and loving hugs they all knew that from this point on, life would be wonderful.