

SHOE DOG

A MEMOIR BY THE CREATOR OF *NIKE*

PHIL
KNIGHT

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A Memoir by the Creator of Nike

PHIL KNIGHT

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For my grandchildren, so they will know

In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's mind there are few.

—Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*

DAWN

I was up before the others, before the birds, before the sun. I drank a cup of coffee, wolfed down a piece of toast, put on my shorts and sweatshirt, and laced up my green running shoes. Then slipped quietly out the back door.

I stretched my legs, my hamstrings, my lower back, and groaned as I took the first few balky steps down the cool road, into the fog. Why is it always so hard to get started?

There were no cars, no people, no signs of life. I was all alone, the world to myself—though the trees seemed oddly aware of me. Then again, this was Oregon. The trees always seemed to know. The trees always had your back.

What a beautiful place to be from, I thought, gazing around. Calm, green, tranquil—I was proud to call Oregon my home, proud to call little Portland my place of birth. But I felt a stab of regret, too. Though beautiful, Oregon struck some people as the kind of place where nothing big had ever happened, or was ever likely to. If we Oregonians were famous for anything, it was an old, old trail we'd had to blaze to get here. Since then, things had been pretty tame.

The best teacher I ever had, one of the finest men I ever knew, spoke of that trail often. It's our birthright, he'd growl. Our character, our fate—our DNA. "The cowards never started," he'd tell me, "and the weak died along the way—that leaves us."

Us. Some rare strain of pioneer spirit was discovered along that trail, my teacher believed, some outsized sense of possibility mixed with a diminished capacity for pessimism—and it was our job as Oregonians to keep that strain alive.

I'd nod, showing him all due respect. I loved the guy. But walking away I'd sometimes think: Jeez, it's just a dirt road.

That foggy morning, that momentous morning in 1962, I'd recently blazed my own trail—back home, after seven long years away. It was strange being home again, strange being lashed again by the daily rains. Stranger still was living again with my parents and twin sisters, sleeping in my childhood bed. Late at night I'd lie on my back, staring at my college textbooks, my high school trophies and blue ribbons, thinking: This is me? *Still?*

I moved quicker down the road. My breath formed rounded, frosty puffs, swirling into the fog. I savored that first physical awakening, that brilliant moment before the mind is fully clear, when the limbs and joints first begin to loosen and the material body starts to melt away. Solid to liquid.

Faster, I told myself. Faster.

On paper, I thought, I'm an adult. Graduated from a good college—University of Oregon. Earned a master's from a top business school—Stanford. Survived a yearlong hitch in the U.S. Army—Fort Lewis and Fort Eustis. My résumé said I was a learned, accomplished soldier, a twenty-four-year-old man in full . . . So why, I wondered, why do I still feel like a kid?

Worse, like the same shy, pale, rail-thin kid I'd always been.

Maybe because I still hadn't experienced anything of life. Least of all its many temptations and excitements. I hadn't smoked a cigarette, hadn't tried a drug. I hadn't broken a rule, let alone a law. The 1960s were just under way, the age of rebellion, and I was the only person in

America who hadn't yet rebelled. I couldn't think of one time I'd cut loose, done the unexpected.

I'd never even been with a girl.

If I tended to dwell on all the things I wasn't, the reason was simple. Those were the things I knew best. I'd have found it difficult to say what or who exactly I was, or might become. Like all my friends I wanted to be successful. Unlike my friends I didn't know what that meant. Money? Maybe. Wife? Kids? House? Sure, if I was lucky. These were the goals I was taught to aspire to, and part of me did aspire to them, instinctively. But deep down I was searching for something else, something more. I had an aching sense that our time is short, shorter than we ever know, short as a morning run, and I wanted mine to be meaningful. And purposeful. And creative. And important. Above all . . . different.

I wanted to leave a mark on the world.

I wanted to win.

No, that's not right. I simply didn't want to lose.

And then it happened. As my young heart began to thump, as my pink lungs expanded like the wings of a bird, as the trees turned to greenish blurs, I saw it all before me, exactly what I wanted my life to be. Play.

Yes, I thought, that's it. That's the word. The secret of happiness, I'd always suspected, the essence of beauty or truth, or all we ever need to know of either, lay somewhere in that moment when the ball is in midair, when both boxers sense the approach of the bell, when the runners near the finish line and the crowd rises as one. There's a kind of exuberant clarity in that pulsing half second before winning and losing are decided. I wanted that, whatever that was, to be my life, my daily life.

At different times I'd fantasized about becoming a great novelist, a great journalist, a great statesman. But the ultimate dream was always to be a great athlete. Sadly, fate had made me good, not great. At twenty-four I was finally resigned to that fact. I'd run track at Oregon, and I'd distinguished myself, lettering three of four years. But that was that, the end. Now, as I began to clip off one brisk six-minute mile after another, as the rising sun set fire to the lowest needles of the pines, I asked myself: What if there were a way, without being an athlete, to feel what athletes feel? To play all the time, instead of working? Or else to enjoy work so much that it becomes essentially the same thing.

The world was so overrun with war and pain and misery, the daily grind was so exhausting and often unjust—maybe the only answer, I thought, was to find some prodigious, improbable dream that seemed worthy, that seemed fun, that seemed a good fit, and chase it with an athlete's single-minded dedication and purpose. Like it or not, life is a game. Whoever denies that truth, whoever simply refuses to play, gets left on the sidelines, and I didn't want that. More than anything, that was the thing I did not want.

Which led, as always, to my Crazy Idea. Maybe, I thought, just maybe, I need to take one more look at my Crazy Idea. Maybe my Crazy Idea just might . . . work?

Maybe.

No, no, I thought, running faster, faster, running as if I were chasing someone *and* being chased all at the same time. It *will* work. By God I'll *make* it work. No maybes about it.

I was suddenly smiling. Almost laughing. Drenched in sweat, moving as gracefully and effortlessly as I ever had, I saw my Crazy Idea shining up ahead, and it didn't look all that crazy. It didn't even look like an idea. It looked like a place. It looked like a person, or some life force that existed long before I did, separate from me, but also part of me.

Waiting for me, but also hiding from me. That might sound a little high-flown, a little *crazy*. But that's how I felt back then.

Or maybe I didn't. Maybe my memory is enlarging this eureka moment, or condensing many eureka moments into one. Or maybe, if there was such a moment, it was nothing more than runner's high. I don't know. I can't say. So much about those days, and the months and years into which they slowly sorted themselves, has vanished, like those rounded, frosty puffs of breath. Faces, numbers, decisions that once seemed pressing and irrevocable, they're all gone.

What remains, however, is this one comforting certainty, this one anchoring truth that will never go away. At twenty-four I *did* have a Crazy Idea, and somehow, despite being dizzy with existential angst, and fears about the future, and doubts about myself, as all young men and women in their midtwenties are, I *did* decide that the world is made up of crazy ideas. History is one long procession of crazy ideas. The things I loved most—books, sports, democracy, free enterprise—started as crazy ideas.

For that matter, few ideas are as crazy as my favorite thing, running. It's hard. It's painful. It's risky. The rewards are few and far from guaranteed. When you run around an oval track, or down an empty road, you have no real destination. At least, none that can fully justify the effort. The act itself becomes the destination. It's not just that there's no finish line; it's that you define the finish line. Whatever pleasures or gains you derive from the act of running, you must find them within. It's all in how you frame it, how you sell it to yourself.

Every runner knows this. You run and run, mile after mile, and you never quite know why. You tell yourself that you're running toward some goal, chasing some rush, but really you run because the alternative, stopping, scares you to death.

So that morning in 1962 I told myself: Let everyone else call your idea crazy . . . just keep going. Don't stop. Don't even think about stopping until you get there, and don't give much thought to where "there" is. Whatever comes, just don't stop.

That's the precocious, prescient, urgent advice I managed to give myself, out of the blue, and somehow managed to take. Half a century later, I believe it's the best advice—maybe the only advice—any of us should ever give.

PART ONE

Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that.

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*

1962

When I broached the subject with my father, when I worked up the nerve to speak to him about my Crazy Idea, I made sure it was in the early evening. That was always the best time with Dad. He was relaxed then, well fed, stretched out in his vinyl recliner in the TV nook. I can still tilt back my head and close my eyes and hear the sound of the audience laughing, the tinny theme songs of his favorite shows, *Wagon Train* and *Rawhide*.

His all-time favorite was Red Buttons. Every episode began with Red singing: *Ho ho, hee hee . . . strange things are happening*.

I set a straight-backed chair beside him and gave a wan smile and waited for the next commercial. I'd rehearsed my spiel, in my head, over and over, especially the opening. *Sooo, Dad, you remember that Crazy Idea I had at Stanford . . . ?*

It was one of my final classes, a seminar on entrepreneurship. I'd written a research paper about shoes, and the paper had evolved from a run-of-the-mill assignment to an all-out obsession. Being a runner, I knew something about running shoes. Being a business buff, I knew that Japanese cameras had made deep cuts into the camera market, which had once been dominated by Germans. Thus, I argued in my paper that Japanese running shoes might do the same thing. The idea interested

me, then inspired me, then captivated me. It seemed so obvious, so simple, so potentially huge.

I'd spent weeks and weeks on that paper. I'd moved into the library, devoured everything I could find about importing and exporting, about starting a company. Finally, as required, I'd given a formal presentation of the paper to my classmates, who reacted with formal boredom. Not one asked a single question. They greeted my passion and intensity with labored sighs and vacant stares.

The professor thought my Crazy Idea had merit: He gave me an A. But that was that. At least, that was supposed to be that. I'd never really stopped thinking about that paper. Through the rest of my time at Stanford, through every morning run and right up to that moment in the TV nook, I'd pondered going to Japan, finding a shoe company, pitching *them* my Crazy Idea, in the hopes that they'd have a more enthusiastic reaction than my classmates, that they'd want to partner with a shy, pale, rail-thin kid from sleepy Oregon.

I'd also toyed with the notion of making an exotic detour on my way to and from Japan. How can I leave my mark on the world, I thought, unless I get out there first and *see* it? Before running a big race, you always want to walk the track. A backpacking trip around the globe might be just the thing, I reasoned. No one talked about bucket lists in those days, but I suppose that's close to what I had in mind. Before I died, became too old or consumed with everyday minutiae, I wanted to visit the planet's most beautiful and wondrous places.

And its most sacred. Of course I wanted to taste other foods, hear other languages, dive into other cultures, but what I really craved was connection with a capital C. I wanted to experience what the Chinese call Tao, the Greeks call Logos, the Hindus call Jñāna, the Buddhists call Dharma. What the Christians call Spirit. Before setting out on my own personal life voyage, I thought, let me first understand the greater

voyage of humankind. Let me explore the grandest temples and churches and shrines, the holiest rivers and mountaintops. Let me feel the presence of . . . God?

Yes, I told myself, yes. For want of a better word, God.

But first, I'd need my father's approval.

More, I'd need his cash.

I'd already mentioned making a big trip, the previous year, and my father seemed open to it. But surely he'd forgotten. And surely I was pushing it, adding to the original proposal this Crazy Idea, this outrageous side trip—to Japan? To launch a company? Talk about boondoggles.

Surely he'd see this as a bridge too far.

And a bridge too darned expensive. I had some savings from the Army, and from various part-time jobs over the last several summers. On top of which, I planned to sell my car, a cherry black 1960 MG with racing tires and a twin cam. (The same car Elvis drove in *Blue Hawaii*.) All of which amounted to fifteen hundred dollars, leaving me a grand short, I now told my father. He nodded, uh-huh, mm-hmm, and flicked his eyes from the TV to me, and back again, while I laid it all out.

Remember how we talked, Dad? How I said I want to see the World?

The Himalayas? The pyramids?

The Dead Sea, Dad? The Dead *Sea*?

Well, haha, I'm also thinking of stopping off in Japan, Dad. Remember my Crazy Idea? Japanese running shoes? Right? It could be huge, Dad. Huge.

I was laying it on thick, putting on the hard sell, extra hard, because I always hated selling, and because this particular sell had zero chance. My father had just forked out hundreds of dollars to the University of Oregon, thousands more to Stanford. He was the publisher of the *Oregon Journal*, a solid job that paid for all the basic comforts, including

our spacious white house on Claybourne Street, in Portland's quietest suburb, Eastmoreland. But the man wasn't made of money.

Also, this was 1962. The earth was bigger then. Though humans were beginning to orbit the planet in capsules, 90 percent of Americans still had never been on an airplane. The average man or woman had never ventured farther than one hundred miles from his or her own front door, so the mere mention of global travel by airplane would unnerve any father, and especially mine, whose predecessor at the paper had died in an air crash.

Setting aside money, setting aside safety concerns, the whole thing was just so impractical. I was aware that twenty-six of twenty-seven new companies failed, and my father was aware, too, and the idea of taking on such a colossal risk went against everything he stood for. In many ways my father was a conventional Episcopalian, a believer in Jesus Christ. But he also worshipped another secret deity—respectability. Colonial house, beautiful wife, obedient kids, my father enjoyed having these things, but what he really cherished was his friends and neighbors *knowing* he had them. He liked being admired. He liked doing a vigorous backstroke each day in the mainstream. Going around the world on a lark, therefore, would simply make no sense to him. It wasn't done. Certainly not by the respectable sons of respectable men. It was something other people's kids did. Something beatniks and hipsters did.

Possibly, the main reason for my father's respectability fixation was a fear of his inner chaos. I felt this, viscerally, because every now and then that chaos would burst forth. Without warning, late at night, the phone in the front hall would jingle, and when I answered there would be that same gravelly voice on the line. "Come getcher old man."

I'd pull on my raincoat—it always seemed, on those nights, that a misting rain was falling—and drive downtown to my father's club. As clearly as I remember my own bedroom, I remember that club. A

century old, with floor-to-ceiling oak bookcases and wing-backed chairs, it looked like the drawing room of an English country house. In other words, eminently respectable.

I'd always find my father at the same table, in the same chair. I'd always help him gently to his feet. "You okay, Dad?" "Course I'm okay." I'd always guide him outside to the car, and the whole way home we'd pretend nothing was wrong. He'd sit perfectly erect, almost regal, and we'd talk sports, because talking sports was how I distracted myself, soothed myself, in times of stress.

My father liked sports, too. Sports were always respectable.

For these and a dozen other reasons I expected my father to greet my pitch in the TV nook with a furrowed brow and a quick put-down. "Haha, Crazy Idea. Fat chance, Buck." (My given name was Philip, but my father always called me Buck. In fact he'd been calling me Buck since before I was born. My mother told me he'd been in the habit of patting her stomach and asking, "How's little Buck today?") As I stopped talking, however, as I stopped pitching, my father rocked forward in his vinyl recliner and shot me a funny look. He said that he always regretted not traveling more when he was young. He said a trip might be just the finishing touch to my education. He said a lot of things, all of them focused more on the trip than the Crazy Idea, but I wasn't about to correct him. I wasn't about to complain, because in sum he was giving his blessing. And his cash.

"Okay," he said. "Okay, Buck. Okay."

I thanked my father and fled the nook before he had a chance to change his mind. Only later did I realize with a spasm of guilt that my father's lack of travel was an ulterior reason, perhaps the main reason, that I wanted to go. This trip, this Crazy Idea, would be one sure way of becoming someone other than him. Someone less respectable.

Or maybe not less respectable. Maybe just less obsessed with respectability.

The rest of the family wasn't quite so supportive. When my grandmother got wind of my itinerary, one item in particular appalled her. "Japan!" she cried. "Why, Buck, it was only a few years ago the Japs were out to kill us! Don't you *remember*? Pearl Harbor! The Japs tried to conquer the world! Some of them still don't know they lost! They're in hiding! They might take you prisoner, Buck. Gouge out your eyeballs. They're known for that—your *eyeballs*."

I loved my mother's mother, whom we all called Mom Hatfield. And I understood her fear. Japan was about as far as you could get from Roseburg, Oregon, the farm town where she was born and where she'd lived all her life. I'd spent many summers down there with her and Pop Hatfield. Almost every night we'd sit out on the porch, listening to the croaking bullfrogs compete with the console radio, which in the early 1940s was always tuned to news of the war.

Which was always bad.

The Japanese, we were told repeatedly, hadn't lost a war in twenty-six hundred years, and it sure didn't seem they were going to lose this one, either. In battle after battle, we suffered defeat after defeat. Finally, in 1942, Mutual Broadcasting's Gabriel Heatter opened his nightly radio report with a shrill cry. "Good evening, everyone—there's *good news* tonight!" The Americans had won a decisive battle at last. Critics skewered Heatter for his shameless cheerleading, for abandoning all pretense of journalistic objectivity, but the public hatred of Japan was so intense, most people hailed Heatter as a folk hero. Thereafter he opened all broadcasts the same way. "*Good news* tonight!"

It's one of my earliest memories. Mom and Pop Hatfield beside me on that porch, Pop peeling a Gravenstein apple with his pocketknife, handing me a slice, then eating a slice, then handing me a slice, and so

on, until his apple-paring pace slowed dramatically. Heater was coming on. *Sssh! Hush up!* I can still see us all chewing apples and gazing at the night sky, so Japan-obsessed that we half expected to see Japanese Zeros crisscrossing the Dog Star. No wonder my first time on an airplane, right around five years old, I asked: “Dad, are the Japs going to shoot us down?”

Though Mom Hatfield got the hair on my neck standing up, I told her not to worry, I’d be fine. I’d even bring her back a kimono.

My twin sisters, Jeanne and Joanne, four years younger than me, didn’t seem to care one way or another where I went or what I did.

And my mother, as I recall, said nothing. She rarely did. But there was something different about her silence this time. It equaled consent. Even pride.

I SPENT WEEKS reading, planning, preparing for my trip. I went for long runs, musing on every detail while racing the wild geese as they flew overhead. Their tight V formations—I’d read somewhere that the geese in the rear of the formation, cruising in the backdraft, only have to work 80 percent as hard as the leaders. Every runner understands this. Front runners always work the hardest, and risk the most.

Long before approaching my father, I’d decided it would be good to have a companion on my trip, and that companion should be my Stanford classmate Carter. Though he’d been a hoops star at William Jewell College, Carter wasn’t your typical jock. He wore thick glasses and read books. Good books. He was easy to talk to, and easy not to talk to—equally important qualities in a friend. Essential in a travel companion.

But Carter laughed in my face. When I laid out the list of places I wanted to see—Hawaii, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Rangoon, Calcutta,

Bombay, Saigon, Kathmandu, Cairo, Istanbul, Athens, Jordan, Jerusalem, Nairobi, Rome, Paris, Vienna, West Berlin, East Berlin, Munich, London—he rocked back on his heels and guffawed. Mortified, I looked down and began to make apologies. Then Carter, still laughing, said: “What a swell idea, Buck!”

I looked up. He wasn’t laughing at me. He was laughing with joy, with glee. He was impressed. It took balls to put together an itinerary like that, he said. Balls. He wanted in.

Days later he got the okay from his parents, plus a loan from his father. Carter never did mess around. See an open shot, take it—that was Carter. I told myself there was much I could learn from a guy like that as we circled the earth.

We each packed one suitcase and one backpack. Only the bare necessities, we promised each other. A few pairs of jeans, a few T-shirts. Running shoes, desert boots, sunglasses, plus one pair of suntans—the 1960s word for khakis.

I also packed one good suit. A green Brooks Brothers two-button. Just in case my Crazy Idea came to fruition.

SEPTEMBER 7, 1962. Carter and I piled into his battered old Chevy and drove at warp speed down I-5, through the Willamette Valley, out the wooded bottom of Oregon, which felt like plunging through the roots of a tree. We sped into the piney tip of California, up and over tall green mountain passes, then down, down, until long after midnight we swept into fog-cloaked San Francisco. For several days we stayed with some friends, sleeping on their floor, and then we swung by Stanford and fetched a few of Carter’s things out of storage. Finally we stopped at a liquor store and bought two discounted tickets on Standard Airlines to Honolulu. One-way, eighty bucks.

It felt like only minutes later that Carter and I were stepping onto the sandy tarmac of Oahu Airport. We wheeled and looked at the sky and thought: That is not the sky back home.

A line of beautiful girls came toward us. Soft-eyed, olive-skinned, barefoot, they had double-jointed hips, with which they twitched and swished their grass skirts in our faces. Carter and I looked at each other and slowly grinned.

We took a cab to Waikiki Beach and checked into a motel directly across the street from the sea. In one motion we dropped our bags and pulled on our swim trunks. Race you to the water!

As my feet hit the sand I whooped and laughed and kicked off my sneakers, then sprinted directly into the waves. I didn't stop until I was up to my neck in the foam. I dove to the bottom, all the way to the bottom, and then came up gasping, laughing, and rolled onto my back. At last I stumbled onto the shore and plopped onto the sand, smiling at the birds and the clouds. I must have looked like an escaped mental patient. Carter, sitting beside me now, wore the same daffy expression.

"We should stay here," I said. "Why be in a hurry to leave?"

"What about The Plan?" Carter said. "Going around the world?"

"Plans change."

Carter grinned. "Swell idea, Buck."

So we got jobs. Selling encyclopedias door to door. Not glamorous, to be sure, but heck. We didn't start work until 7:00 p.m., which gave us plenty of time for surfing. Suddenly nothing was more important than learning to surf. After only a few tries I was able to stay upright on a board, and after a few weeks I was good. Really good.

Gainfully employed, we ditched our motel room and signed a lease on an apartment, a furnished studio with two beds, one real, one fake—a sort of ironing board that folded out from the wall. Carter, being longer and heavier, got the real bed, and I got the ironing board. I

didn't care. After a day of surfing and selling encyclopedias, followed by a late night at the local bars, I could have slept in a luau fire pit. The rent was one hundred bucks a month, which we split down the middle.

Life was sweet. Life was heaven. Except for one small thing. I couldn't sell encyclopedias.

I couldn't sell encyclopedias to save my life. The older I got, it seemed, the shier I got, and the sight of my extreme discomfort often made strangers uncomfortable. Thus, selling anything would have been challenging, but selling *encyclopedias*, which were about as popular in Hawaii as mosquitoes and mainlanders, was an ordeal. No matter how deftly or forcefully I managed to deliver the key phrases drilled into us during our brief training session ("Boys, tell the folks you ain't selling encyclopedias—you're selling a Vast Compendium of Human Knowledge . . . the Answers to Life's Questions!"), I always got the same response.

Beat it, kid.

If my shyness made me bad at selling encyclopedias, my nature made me despise it. I wasn't built for heavy doses of rejection. I'd known this about myself since high school, freshman year, when I got cut from the baseball team. A small setback, in the grand scheme, but it knocked me sideways. It was my first real awareness that not everyone in this world will like us, or accept us, that we're often cast aside at the very moment we most need to be included.

I will never forget that day. Dragging my bat along the sidewalk, I staggered home and holed up in my room, where I grieved, and moped, for about two weeks, until my mother appeared on the edge of my bed and said, "Enough."

She urged me to try something else. "Like what?" I groaned into my pillow. "How about track?" she said. "Track?" I said. "You can run fast, Buck." "I can?" I said, sitting up.

So I went out for track. And I found that I *could* run. And no one could take that away.

Now I gave up selling encyclopedias, and all the old familiar rejection that went with it, and I turned to the want ads. In no time I spotted a small ad inside a thick black border. *Wanted: Securities Salesmen*. I certainly figured to have better luck selling securities. After all, I had an MBA. And before leaving home I'd had a pretty successful interview with Dean Witter.

I did some research and found that this job had two things going for it. First, it was with Investors Overseas Services, which was headed by Bernard Cornfeld, one of the most famous businessmen of the 1960s. Second, it was located in the top floor of a beautiful beachside tower. Twenty-foot windows overlooking that turquoise sea. Both of these things appealed to me, and made me press hard in the interview. Somehow, after weeks of being unable to talk anyone into buying an encyclopedia, I talked Team Cornfeld into taking a flyer on me.

CORNFELD'S EXTRAORDINARY SUCCESS, plus that breathtaking view, made it possible most days to forget that the firm was nothing more than a boiler room. Cornfeld was notorious for asking his employees if they *sincerely* wanted to be rich, and every day a dozen wolfish young men demonstrated that they did, they *sincerely* did. With ferocity, with abandon, they crashed the phones, cold-calling prospects, scrambling desperately to arrange face-to-face meetings.

I wasn't a smooth talker. I wasn't any kind of talker. Still, I knew numbers, and I knew the product: Dreyfus Funds. More, I knew how to speak the truth. People seemed to like that. I was quickly able to schedule a few meetings, and to close a few sales. Inside a week I'd

earned enough in commissions to pay my half of the rent for the next six months, with plenty left over for surfboard wax.

Most of my discretionary income went to the dive bars along the water. Tourists tended to hang out in the luxe resorts, the ones with names like incantations—the Moana, the Halekulani—but Carter and I preferred the dives. We liked to sit with our fellow beachniks and surf bums, seekers and vagabonds, feeling smug about the one thing we had in our favor. Geography. Those poor suckers back home, we'd say. Those poor saps sleepwalking through their humdrum lives, bundled against the cold and rain. Why can't they be more like us? Why can't they seize the day?

Our sense of *carpe diem* was heightened by the fact that the world was coming to an end. A nuclear standoff with the Soviets had been building for weeks. The Soviets had three dozen missiles in Cuba, the United States wanted them out, and both sides had made their final offer. Negotiations were over and World War III was set to begin any minute. According to the newspapers, missiles would fall from the sky later today. Tomorrow at the latest. The world was Pompeii, and the volcano was already spitting ash. Ah well, everyone in the dive bars agreed, when humanity ends, this will be as good a place as any to watch the rising mushroom clouds. Aloha, civilization.

And then, surprise, the world was spared. The crisis passed. The sky seemed to sigh with relief as the air turned suddenly crisper, calmer. A perfect Hawaiian autumn followed. Days of contentment and something close to bliss.

Followed by a sharp restlessness. One night I set my beer on the bar and turned to Carter. "I think maybe the time has come to leave Shangri-La," I said.

I didn't make a hard pitch. I didn't think I had to. It was clearly time to get back to The Plan. But Carter frowned and stroked his chin. "Gee,

Buck, I don't know.”

He'd met a girl. A beautiful Hawaiian teenager with long brown legs and jet-black eyes, the kind of girl who'd greeted our airplane, the kind I dreamed of having and never would. He wanted to stick around, and how could I argue?

I told him I understood. But I was cast low. I left the bar and went for a long walk on the beach. Game over, I told myself.

The last thing I wanted was to pack up and return to Oregon. But I couldn't see traveling around the world alone, either. Go home, a faint inner voice told me. Get a normal job. Be a normal person.

Then I heard another faint voice, equally emphatic. No, don't go home. Keep going. Don't stop.

The next day I gave my two weeks' notice at the boiler room. “Too bad, Buck,” one of the bosses said, “you had a real future as a salesman.” “God forbid,” I muttered.

That afternoon, at a travel agency down the block, I purchased an open plane ticket, good for one year on any airline going anywhere. A sort of Eurail Pass in the sky. On Thanksgiving Day, 1962, I hoisted my backpack and shook Carter's hand. “Buck,” he said, “don't take any wooden nickels.”

THE CAPTAIN ADDRESSED the passengers in rapid-fire Japanese, and I started to sweat. I looked out the window at the blazing red circle on the wing. Mom Hatfield was right, I thought. We were *just* at war with these people. Corregidor, the Bataan Death March, the Rape of Nanking—and now I was going there on some sort of *business* venture?

Crazy Idea? Maybe I was, *in fact*, crazy.

If so, it was too late to seek professional help. The plane was screeching down the runway, roaring above Hawaii's cornstarch