

JERRY BAXTER

In high school, being fresh out of the country where I was mostly isolated from anyone my own age, I was ready for friends. As a freshman (in Jr. High, at an old school building in the east part of Stafford) I lived in a rented room, had a bicycle, and had long evenings. At some point during that first high school year I came to know Jerry Baxter. His father owned and operated, with the help of Jerry and his mother, one of the two drug stores in Stafford. Jerry and I, in the course of the four high school years, became as brothers--perhaps a bit closer, since we never quarreled. He was my first--maybe only--really close friend. Jerry was very intelligent, and had a wonderful sense of humor. As a country boy-city boy combination, our educations and experiences overlapped some, but were mostly complimentary. We both liked the same subjects, and were good in math, chemistry and physics. We actually did well in most all of our classes, and took mostly the same ones. (Unlike Jerry, I had one in Journalism. The class published the school newspaper, and we set the type for it too!)

Jerry and I of course vowed that we would stay friends all of our lives, and that we would try to live close to each other when the war was over. I was best man for Jerry's and Jeannette's wedding. That occurred after we had graduated from high school and while I was a freshman in college. Had it not been for the war, he would have been best man at my wedding, too. Jerry and Jeannette had been going together for a number of years, and were actually dating as freshmen. After Addie Leah and I began dating, we double dated with them, and were all good friends.

Graduating from high school in 1941 meant that we were precisely the right age to become swept up in the war, and we therefore were able to communicate only with letters until the war was over. Our eldest children, Karen and Jeanne, were born in the spring of 1945. The next pair of girls, Dianne and Nancy, were born in 1947, again only weeks apart. But we didn't see each other but once even after our boys were born, in 1950. When Addie Leah became pregnant with Wayne, I wrote Jerry a post card. "On GUARD!" it said. The reply came quickly. "Too Late." So the parallel births of our first three children seemed to be destiny!

Jerry's father died of cancer during the war, as I remember, maybe incorrectly, and

after that Jerry started his own business in air conditioning, plumbing, etc. We saw each other in the summer of 1957, and then not again until the summer of 1980. I don't know when he first discovered his cancer, but over a period of years he had many tumors removed. We kept in touch by mail but never made a concerted effort to get together. Once Jerry and Jeannette came to Los Alamos, but I was on travel, so we went a long time without seeing each other. But it wasn't that we had grown apart really, for our feelings for each other remained.

One Saturday morning in the summer of 1980, early, I dreamed about Jerry. It was a dream unlike any that I had ever experienced. Out of a plain blue background and a formless expanse, Jerry came walking toward me. When he got close enough for me to see who it was I exclaimed "Jerry!" He said "I've come to tell you goodbye." We talked very briefly, but he told me how much I'd always meant to him, how he's saved my letters, etc. I protested mildly, but mostly the dream consisted of Jerry's short speech. As it ended, I sat up in bed, awakened Addie Leah, telling her that I had just had the most amazing dream in my whole life, totally unlike anything I had experienced before. Later that morning I tried to call Jerry on the phone, but no answer. The same on Sunday--no answer. I tried no more until the next weekend, and when I called then, Jerry answered. After the initial greetings, Jerry asked "Why did you call?" "Oh", I said "I just thought it was time to get in touch." "But why did you call?" "Well, I had a dream about you a few days ago, and that triggered me to call." "What did you dream?" "Oh, just a dream". Despite Jerry's continued attempts to get me to tell him about the dream, I didn't do it. However, the telephone conversation ended with a date for the Brownlees to go to Tulsa to visit the Baxter's a few weeks later.

In Tulsa, the story came out. Jerry had discovered new cancerous tumors in his eyes, and the Doctor had told him he would have to have them taken out. Since he had previously had of the order of fifty operations to remove such tumors, it was becoming very old. Jerry had become an avid Christian through the years, and had no fear of dying. This time he told the Doctor that he had fought a good fight, for a long time, and this time he just wanted to let it go. After this decision Jerry and Jeannette went to their cabin on a lake near Tulsa, and Jerry decided he would go through things, sorting and throwing away, etc. He came upon my old letters, got them out to re-read, and decided he wanted to tell me goodbye. That was the Friday night before my dream on Saturday morning! He missed my calls that morning and those on Sunday for he was still at his cabin. He had continued to think of me repeatedly during the week before I called, so when I did, he was

primed for a conversation, and primed to ask about the dream. Jerry died in January, 1981.

The world has never really been the same for me since then. The fact that we saw each other virtually not at all during all those years apparently had nothing to do with the loss I felt after he died.

I've never believed in ESP, or UFO's, etc., and still don't. So I have no explanation for this experience.

Note added in March, 1994. Jeannette died on February 8, 1994, and once again I feel a great loss. After Jerry's death, Jeannette and I kept in contact. They were more than just friends to me--they were a vital part of my life.