



LONE MAN

By Rick Townley

...AND LONE MAN WANDERED THE EARTH SINGING A SONG, "WHO AM I?
WHERE DID I COME FROM?"

Southern Alabama, 1962

I hardly see dad anymore since he got that new job. He works all night at the chicken factory over on Route 231. He said he doesn't like it much but it's all he could find and at least now he can feed my "sorry ass." Dad uses a lot of cuss words. He always seems unhappy. I try to keep things neat around the house but that's never enough. He always has something to yell about. The other day I cleaned up the whole kitchen. I used cleanser and got those old stains out of the sink, but he didn't even notice. He gets home every day just before I have to leave for school. The bus picks me up down at the end of our road and the driver doesn't like to wait very long so I have to make sure I get out on time. It's hard to walk fast or run on that road since it's all dirt with a lot of holes and rocks, so you have to watch your step or you'll sprain your ankle. Dad says it's a "real bitch" on his car, but that doesn't stop him from driving fast and bouncing us around. It feels like being on a carnival ride and makes me laugh, and that makes dad shout and yell louder, first at the road, then at the car and then at me. It's really funny.

We're the only ones who still live on that road. There are more houses further in, but they're closed down and abandoned since everybody left when the airplane factory shut down. It's kind of creepy watching the houses fall apart and get all covered over with vines and weeds. I used to go in and play in them sometimes, but dad found out and whapped me good. He said it was dangerous and that if I got hurt he'd kill me. That didn't make a lot of sense to me, but that's just dad. He's always saying things like that. He just seems unhappy all the time since my mom left us. So I stopped playing inside the other houses, but I still wander down the road sometimes and pretend I have a huge ranch and that one house nearby is really a barn for my horse Snowfire. The other houses are where my story friends live, including an old Mandan Indian named Lone Man who helps me out a lot. Snowfire is a great white horse, very strong and very fast, but I'll talk about him later. Right now I have to get the kitchen cleaned up - dad made a mess with the chicken blood again - and then get my homework done. We're studying all about rockets and space. My teacher says that someday man will even walk on the moon. I try to imagine that sometimes, as I look up at that old moon at night. Wow, walking on the moon. That's pretty amazing.

I guess I should tell about our house. It's not much, just one floor with two bedrooms and a living room, a bathroom and a kitchen. We don't have a lot of furniture, just a worn out old couch with flowers on it and a couple of loose springs under the cushions. A soft chair with the arms worn through to the wood and a couple of small tables. On one table is this weird old electric clock under a glass dome. It has little round balls at the end of rods that turn one way, then rotate slowly back the other way. Mom called it an

anniversary clock but I don't know why. Maybe she got it as a present. The kitchen just has a table and a couple of wood chairs, and the bathroom is kind of old and the sink is almost rusted through. I hate the toilet. It has one of those tanks up on the wall that you have to pull the chain to flush. It's also got rust stains and looks disgusting no matter how much I scrub it with cleaning powder. Dad never cleans the bathroom. He says that's work for women. I guess he thinks I'm a woman. When I grow up I'm going to make sure I get a woman of my own and never let her go away like my mom, even if that means I have to help her clean the bathroom and stuff.

The outside of the house is what mom used to call "puke green" and the paint is pretty faded and peeling in places. At least the windows still open, which is good in the summer when it gets so hot around here. Dad says it's called a bungalow and it was built when some factory first opened a long time ago, like in the 1920's or something, for people who worked there. He said there were lots of houses in the town just like this one, but over time factories would open and close, people moved on and finally a lot of the houses just fell apart or were bulldozed down. Dad says that factory owners are "cheap bastards" and don't build houses for workers anymore. I guess they all looked pretty much like ours and sometimes I try to imagine what it was like back then with lots of houses on the road and people living in them. I wish there were people still around because it would be great to have some real friends to play with. I like my room. I have a saggy old bed with a big dip in the mattress where I can put my butt when I lay on my back. It's kind of like it's molded to my shape like the seats the astronauts have in the Mercury capsules.

I have a lot of stuff on the wall, pictures, posters and things I find in magazines, that I like to look at. Sometimes dad brings home Look and Life magazines from work and I cut out pictures and tape them to the walls. He says he gets them in the front office waiting room, I'm not sure what that is exactly, the only waiting rooms I know are at the bus station and the hospital. Sometimes he brings magazines about farms and chickens, but I don't read them, they're too boring. I don't think dad reads them either but he tells his boss he wants to learn about the business so he can work in the office at a desk like he used to at the airplane factory. They didn't really make whole airplanes, just a lot of parts, but I guess they were the wrong kind of parts for the new jetliners. Someday I want to fly in that new Caravelle jet that has just two engines in the back. Sometimes I see one fly overhead and it's really neat because they are so quiet you can hardly hear them, compared to regular planes. I've got some great pictures of Alan Shepard, the Mercury capsule, and a big chart of the solar system. One day I want to go up in space too, but right now I have to take care of Snowfire and make sure he's safe. You'd be surprised how many bad people try to get on my private ranch and steal him.

In one corner of my room is an old wood desk that I use to make models and do my homework on. I have a metal lamp with a cone-shaped head and a long neck that bends and reminds me of a brontosaurus trying to eat things on my desk. The light is good enough that I don't need to put on the overhead. That light makes everything too bright and ugly. My desk lamp makes the room seem nice and warm and safe at night even if there are a lot of shadows. I don't believe in ghosts so I'm not afraid to stay home at night by myself. Dad says there's no choice anyway and that when he was eleven he was always left on his own. He says too many parents spoil their kids these days and that I'm going to grow up and never have to work in a chicken factory like him. The bad thing about my lamp is that the metal shade gets really hot so I have to be careful not to touch it. I used to have a neat plastic figure of Roy Rogers riding his horse, it was pretty big, and it got too close to the lamp and melted his hand. When I played with it after that I would pretend he was wounded in a gunfight but then one day dad got mad at me and threw it against the wall and that was the end of that.

I wish I had a rug in my room. I had one when I was a little kid that had pictures of cowboys and horses and Indians, but our old basset hound Charlie messed on it a few times and dad threw it out. He said you can never get rid of dog poop smells. Then Charlie messed in the living room so dad threw him out too. I hope Charlie found a good home. Dad said he drove him in the car near a big farm and let him out so he probably was taken in and now lives on the farm chasing chickens. Oh, that was another thing. Dad got real upset one night when Charlie got a pair of his old shoes out of the closet and chewed them up. I found them first and wasn't sure what to do. I think the shoes had chicken blood on them and Charlie sniffed it and thought they were dinner, but dad yelled, and said he'd never put shoes away with chicken blood on them and that the dog was a menace. Well there was something on those shoes that Charlie liked, he never chewed on my shoes. I hope he's happy on the farm.

It's getting pretty late so I should probably get to bed soon. It's windy and there's a storm coming. I hate the storms around here, they can get pretty loud. Sometimes they just roll in really fast at night with a lot of thunder that shakes the whole house, and lightning that lights up my room like the flash on mom's Brownie Hawkeye. I still have some of the pictures mom took with it and they're in color. I like color stuff. I read about the new color TV's but I've never seen one. It said in a magazine that Disney was going to have a color show on soon. I wish I could see it. We don't even have a regular TV here. None of the photos I have are of mom. Dad threw those away when she left. I found her camera after mom left us. She always loved it, so I was surprised she didn't take it with her, but she probably was in a hurry and forgot it. She used to keep it in her dresser drawer, but I found it tossed into the little outdoor shed attached to the back of the house. I'm not supposed to go in there since that's where the water heater is and dad said that if I ever broke the thing he'd "kick my ass up over my ears."

When dad said that it made me giggle and that made him even madder. He shouted "Just do as I say!" and smacked me upside the head. So I didn't go in the shed, except once when we were studying about bugs in school. I remembered there were black widow spiders in the shed and I wanted to see one. They're creepy little things and attach right to the side of an inside wall and hide inside an all white web that looks like a little tiny blanket. I've seen dad just crush them and brush them off, but I tried to scrape one off to see if I could capture the spider. I got the web loose, it was only as big as a quarter, but the spider dropped to the floor and ran off. That's when I saw the camera down there next to the bottom of the water heater. Mom must have been mad at it because it looked like she had just opened the door and tossed it inside. Now I have it hidden in an old shoe box in my closet. If dad saw it he'd probably get mad. Everything makes him mad these days. When I checked out the camera it still had some shots left so I took some pictures of the yard and the other houses down the road and used up all but one shot, but I don't have \$2.83 to get the pictures developed just yet. It would be a lot cheaper if mom used black and white film, but she preferred color pictures so it's a lot more to get them made. I'm pretty close though, I have \$2.30 saved up, so I just need 53-cents more.

I can hear the storm getting closer. There was just some noisy thunder and I saw lightning and it's started raining. When I was looking out my window some lightning came and I thought I saw somebody out in the back yard. It was just a quick flash, like mom's camera, but it really did look like a man out there with a hat and a long coat, like a black raincoat maybe, and he was just standing there staring at the house. It was really creepy. Then there was some more lightning and the man was gone. There shouldn't be anybody around here since we're the only ones living on this road. Maybe somebody got lost or their car broke down or something. I went to the kitchen door and made sure it was

locked. Of course it had glass panes that anybody could break and reach through, but I tried not to think about that. For now it was my protection against any danger. If I had to I could dial the phone and call dad's work. I remembered that sometimes the phone could go out in a storm so I tried it and there was still a dial tone. I was safe for now.

To make myself feel better I went and got my weapons from under the bed where I keep my arsenal. I have a few cap guns, including a shiny Fanner 50 with the marshal holster and a bunch of fake bullets that you can actually put into the cylinder. My grown up side told me it was silly, but my cowboy side told me to bring it out anyway. If nothing else it looks real and maybe could scare someone off. Then I reached for my bow and arrows that I got from Lone Man. It's a real long bow made out of wood and I have three arrows that go with it. I used it all over the place and even killed a snake with it one time. I guess it's a little confusing why a cowboy would use a bow and arrow so I'll try to explain. One day I went down the road to the old Johnson house, on the left around the bend in the road. This is before dad said I had to stay out of the old houses. I was looking around inside because sometimes I would find things that people left behind when they moved out. Mostly I'd find old bottles that I could turn in and get the deposit for, but I've found old magazines and books and even an old hunting knife with a bone handle, a leather sheath and everything. I keep that under my bed too. So I'm poking around inside the Johnson house and I hear somebody in another room and the voice asks "who's there?"

I about jumped out of my skin and started to run when this old guy walked out of a bedroom and says "slow down scout, it's okay, I won't harm you." I was about halfway out the front door but I stopped because I was real curious even though I was plenty scared. I thought, "maybe dad was right, this is dangerous." So it turns out that this is some old guy named Jack Loman who says he's a real Indian but I don't believe him at first because he doesn't look like an Indian. He was dressed like a regular guy in old clothes but he didn't even have long hair or face paint or feathers or anything. He seemed okay and we started talking and stuff and then we got to be good friends after a while and I'd go visit him all the time. I called him Mr. Loman because I was taught that you always call grownups mister or miss or missus, but he said he hated that name and I should call him Lone Man instead. He swore it was his real Indian name and that he used to live out west on a real reservation but went east looking for work because they were so poor out there. He said he worked on skyscrapers in New York City for a while but got too old then he wandered south here looking for work but hadn't found any yet. He had some great stories about Indian life and the west and I told him all about what happened with my mom and my dad, and what it's like living around here now. He never said much, just nodded his head a lot.

One time after mom left I was helping dad replace a broken headlight on the Chrysler, he said he had hit an animal or something, when I slipped up and mentioned Lone Man. It's an old car, a 1952 Chrysler Imperial that dad said he bought a long time ago from one of the bosses at the old factory when he still had lots of money. It's big, really big, and I like to sit in back sometimes and pretend it's a limousine and he's my driver, but then he yells at me to get up front because he's not a driver and I'm not a big shot. He says when he gets money again he wants to get a brand new Dodge Dart Seneca, named after Indians, and that's when I thought it a good time to say that I knew an Indian called Lone Man, but referred to him as Mr. Loman so my dad would think I was respectful. I had no idea he'd get so mad about that and he made me get in the car with the headlight parts still out and sitting on the ground, and he drove us down to the old Johnson house. I had to stay in the car while he went inside and looked around then came out looking real confused. I knew the look. It meant he didn't know what to do with me. He asked me over and over if I was making it all up. I insisted Lone Man was real, and that seemed to make him mad

again so he made me stay in my room that afternoon. He said I could come out when I decided to tell the truth. Well, I was telling the truth what more did he want?

A few weeks later is when I got the bow and arrows. Getting yelled at was no big deal and I kept going to see Lone Man anyway. It felt good to be able to talk about my dad and I even cried a little bit about my mom but Lone Man was always calm and quiet like I imagined a grandpa would be. He just accepted me the way I was and was interested in stuff I told him about school, and rocket ships and Snowfire, and he always asked how many Indians I killed that day, whenever I showed up with my Fanner 50 after roaming around in the woods and was all hot and sweaty from my story games. One day he told me a story about this Mohican Indian and his friend Hawkeye, which made me curious since that was the same name as my mom's camera, and then he gave me this old bow and these three arrows. I gave up being a cowboy every day and sometimes was an Indian instead. Then I'd visit and he'd ask, "how many cowboys did you shoot today?" and I'd tell him about all the bad guys. Then he'd tell me all sorts of stories about real Indians and cowboys and I just really loved listening to him.

My dad found the bow and arrows one day and had a fit when I told him I got them from Lone Man. He said he thought that was all over with and said I was making things up again. So I got grounded again, but he couldn't make me stay in my room since he worked nights and I could get out after school when he was still sleeping. Lone Man seemed to get angry when I talked about my dad, but he never said much, just things like "that's too bad," or "that sounds tough on you." I tried to keep it a secret that I was still hanging around with Lone Man, but sometimes dad would suspect and ground me even if I didn't say anything. He said I had an over active imagination and that I was acting just like my mother because she thought she saw things too. I never knew that about my mom. I wasn't sure I wanted to believe it. She was always nice to me even if she didn't want to stay with me, but I never talked to dad about any of that since it made him really mad and then he'd drink and he was not nice when he drank.

Then things got really weird. I wanted to prove to dad that Lone Man was a real guy so one day I took my mom's camera and snapped my last picture of him when he wasn't looking. It made Lone Man kind of mad. He said he didn't like having his picture taken because Indians believe a camera can do more than just capture your image. They think it can steal your soul. That seemed kind of strange and we talked about it for a while. He looked at the camera and said it was just like one he'd given his little girl a long time ago, but he wouldn't talk about her so I stopped asking questions. I told him I just used the last picture and that I was saving up to have the roll developed and was now just 28-cents from having enough to take it to the drug store. I had gotten a quarter from dad the week before as an allowance for cleaning up around the house. I had allowances before but dad usually forgot to pay me or said he didn't have it so I didn't think this would last either, but a quarter is a quarter and goes a long way. I can get a comic book, a bottle of pop and a couple sticks of bubble gum for a quarter. That's a lot of money. So Lone Man seemed real interested in my pictures and was disappointed when I said I didn't have any of my mother. He said she sounded like she was a pretty nice lady and got me talking all about her until I started to get upset and cry and had to run home. A man doesn't cry like that and I was embarrassed. But as I was leaving, Lone Man grabbed my hand and put some coins in it.

I made a fist and didn't look at the coins until I got home and went in my room with the door closed. Dad was still sleeping and I hoped I wouldn't even have to see him before he left for work. He was starting to get on my nerves and was more mean than usual this

past week. He kept trying to be nice to me but then the slightest little thing would set him off and he'd yell and carry on like a mad man. I tried to stay away from him as much as I could. When I looked at the coins I saw that one was a quarter, or what looked like a quarter. It was real dirty and tarnished and I'd never seen anything quite like it. A real quarter has a picture of Washington on the front and an eagle symbol on the back. Everybody knows that. This quarter had some kind of lady on the front with the date "1924," and a flying eagle on the back. I know there are a lot old coins still around, but I don't see much money so this was quite a surprise to me. The pennies were really tarnished and discolored and seemed normal enough. They were from the 1920's also, but they looked normal, with Lincoln on the front and the two things of wheat on the back. I don't think they'll ever change the penny design.

Old or new, a quarter is a quarter and now I had enough to get the pictures developed. That night I made plans on how to get the film to the drug store. I would go with dad to town on Saturday and tell him I wanted to go look at the comics in the drug store while he was at the auto parts store. The headlight parts he had didn't work out and he was real concerned he'd get a ticket for having just one light, so I knew he'd definitely go to town. It turned out that my plan worked perfectly and dad even gave me a dime for a new comic book. I got the one with Superman against the fire thing and the frozen guy. I haven't read it yet, I'm saving it for the next time I get grounded in my room. There was just one problem with my plan. I had to get back to town the next weekend to pick up the film. I had insisted on pre-paying, which made the clerk suspicious, but he took the money anyway and said the pictures would be ready in a few days. During that next week I made plans with Jimmy Cummerford at school to pick them up for me since he lived real close to downtown, but I never got to see the pictures because the druggist guy wouldn't give them out and then called my dad instead. Dad turned beet red when he got the phone call and was real quiet and respectful to the druggist and said he would come in on Saturday because he couldn't find time during the week. He didn't speak to me all week long and I stayed away from him.

I think the storm is almost on top of us now. It's raining pretty hard and there's a lot of thunder and lightning. Some lightning is even hitting the ground outside. Lone Man told me that if you see lightning, count the seconds until you hear the thunder and that will tell you how far away the storm is. Maybe I have that backwards I'm not sure, but either way I count it's like just one second until I see lightning or hear thunder. I imagine the road out front is getting pretty muddy and that means dad will have to park his car at the head of our road, where you turn in off the paved road, and he'll be plenty worked up by the time he walks in through the mud at breakfast time. Well, that's a long way off and I'll try to get off to school early. Oh yeah, he said we're probably going to move soon, but I'm getting ahead of myself. So that Saturday dad goes and gets the pictures and doesn't let me see them. He was sitting in the living room looking at them and acted embarrassed when I walked in and he quickly tried to put the photos back in the envelope. I asked why I couldn't see them and he said they were of my mother and not for me to see. That made me even more curious about why I couldn't look at pictures of my own mother. When he said "no" I kept asking "why not?" until he finally snapped and yelled at me, "because I said so, that's why!" He said that a lot. It was his way of warning me that if I asked again I'd probably get smacked.

He reached into the envelope, pulled out just the pictures I'd taken and tossed them on the little table in front of the couch. Then he asked who the man was in one of them. I picked it up and looked, but I didn't want to answer. I knew if I didn't say, I'd get smacked. That day was shaping up to be what I call a "smack day" when everything I do or say gets me a smack from my father. So I decided to just get it over with and told him

that was a picture of Lone Man and that I'd taken it at the old Johnson house where he stayed sometimes. I explained that he didn't live there all the time, he moved around a lot, but that he was also my friend and was always nice to me. I thought it curious that dad wanted to know if Lone Man ever asked about my mother and I said "no," but blushed because I knew I actually had said things about her even though Lone Man never really asked anything directly. My father noticed my blush and assumed I was lying. I guess I was, a little, but I insisted that the truth was "no, he never asks about mom." I felt relieved that I didn't get smacked. Dad was in a really strange mood today and his face and eyes made him look like he was far away, like he had a lot of things on his mind and that I wasn't really one of them, fortunately for me.

The storm is starting to move off already. I'm glad because then dad won't show up in the morning all mad about the muddy road. But something odd is going on outside. I thought at first it was more lightning, but lightning isn't red. This is a red light and it's not going away. It's flashing like a police car light. I just looked out the window and saw the same man I saw before only this time he's moving around and he has a big flashlight. It's a police officer! And there are others and now they're all coming closer to the house. This is really weird. I'm going to go out to the kitchen and look out to see what...wait...my dad is standing in the doorway to my room. He's soaking wet and looks really mad. I don't want...no, dad, no...

It's been a few weeks since that night and I'm afraid that what I know is just what I was told afterward. I guess I was out for a couple days because when my dad came in my room we must have fought and he smacked me in the head and knocked me out cold. He was supposed to be at work and ran off when he heard the police were looking for him, but I have no idea why. All I knew was that my dad was just a regular guy who was upset because my mother left him, and me, and sometimes he drank and got angry at the world, and at me. He used to work in an office at the airplane factory, but I'm not sure what he did. When that shut down he was out of work for a long time and that's when he and mom started to argue a lot. Then she left and things were really hard for a while, then he finally got a job as a slicer at the chicken factory. I remember him saying that was about as low as he could possibly go for work and that it totally disgusted him to sit there all day and, well he never did tell me exactly what he did. I found out much later what a slicer does. So now I can only guess that must have really gotten to him. I don't think he was a real bad guy, but something, well I don't know, I just don't.

So he came in my room all wet and angry and told me we had to go, but I said no and put up a fight. At the same time I could hear the police coming closer to the house since they were all shouting for him to come out and saying police stuff to each other. I could see past him into the living room and the kitchen beyond and that's where the red lights were coming from. There must have been around four or five cars out front judging from the amount of flashing light, and it made the inside seem really eerie like some kind of science fiction movie. Dad started shouting at me about the pictures and what I had done to him and how I'd ruined everything because I was a nosy little bastard who just couldn't mind his own business. I really didn't understand. They were just pictures and I didn't even know what they were. And then he started saying a lot of bad things about my mother and Lone Man and that made me really mad. We struggled but it wasn't much of a fight since he was so much bigger than me. I managed to wriggle away at one point and crawl under my bed where I had hidden the old hunting knife I'd found at the Johnson house. He grabbed my leg and pulled me out from under, then I twisted around and stabbed him in the leg. Blood gushed all over the place, it was really disgusting and I immediately froze up realizing I'd done something really, really bad. When I stabbed him

he screamed, real loud, then reached down and smacked me in the head. I guess it knocked me against the bed post and I hit my head. I don't know if his smack or the wooden post knocked me out, but I went out and that was that.

A couple days later I woke up in the hospital and there was Lone Man sitting by my bed. He looked different, cleaner and all fixed up in a nice new suit. He didn't look like a vagrant at all, he looked like a respectable businessman. He also looked relieved and rushed over to the bed and gave me a big hug. I had tons of questions but he told me to stay calm, that he'd tell me everything when I was stronger. I was still pretty groggy and everything that happened seemed hazy and long ago. Apparently I fell back asleep again and woke up again a few hours later. Lone Man stayed right by my side the whole time and told me I had a nasty bump on the head that knocked me out for a couple days. He called it a coma. I asked if it was like on Ben Casey, the new TV show that I'd never seen but my friends at school talked about so much. Jimmy told me that in every show there was a patient who had a head injury called a "subdural hematoma" that just really meant "bump on the head." He thought it was pretty funny so I thought it was funny because he thought so. I had promised myself that one day I would get to see the show. Jimmy also came to school one day wearing this great all-white doctor shirt that buttoned down the side, and he told me about another show with a Dr. Kildare who wore the same kind of shirt. I wanted to see that show one day too.

I was still kind of fuzzy so I'm not sure I heard everything right, but after a while a nurse and a man came in the hospital room and he was wearing a Dr. Kildare shirt so I figured he must be a doctor. Again, I may have dreamed this, but I thought I heard the nurse introduce Lone Man to the doctor as Jack Loman, "the boy's grandfather." The three of them chatted for a while then the doctor left, the nurse checked my pulse and Lone Man sat down again with a book he had brought. He read quietly while the nurse fussed over me and did all that nurse stuff they do, and I kept looking at him and wondering about what I thought I had just heard. I had never met my grandfather, my mother's father. My dad's father was killed in the war so I never met him either. The only history I knew was that mom's dad and my dad hated each other, and then something about my parents running away to another state to get married and have me. That was a long time ago and all I ever knew I learned from when mom and dad would fight and yell things at each other. Then they would make up and everything would be fine again, for a while at least. Sometimes it embarrassed me because they'd be all lovey dovey and stuff and go to their room and make a lot of funny noises, then later they'd be throwing things around and fighting all over again. When mom left it was real quiet for a while until dad seemed to start yelling at me instead. I never knew what would make him happy or angry.

It wasn't until weeks later that I found out my dad was taken to the same hospital I was in. I guess he bled a lot from the knife wound, but he was okay and nobody said a thing to me about it ever again. I was told that he was in jail somewhere and nobody would tell me for what or for how long. The neat part is that it turned out that Lone Man really is my grandfather, my mom's dad, and he had been kind of hanging around the area to check on me. He said he had also been investigating something because the police were useless and couldn't help him. I don't know what or why, all I know is what I'm told. Anyway, he knew all along who I was but didn't want to scare me or upset my dad so he told me he was an Indian to make friends with me. He really was part Indian anyway, and had a grandmother who long before had told him when he was just a boy about the legend of Lone Man. So he didn't really lie to me or make up that much, and I think it's neat that my mom and I are part Indian too. I still call him Lone Man and he said one day he'll take me out west and show me a real reservation, but I have to be good and stay healthy. He said I probably won't see much of my dad again but wouldn't tell me more

than that. I think it's great to have a grandpa and I don't know why dad hated him so much because he's a pretty good guy and we do lots together. I guess my grandmother died a long time ago so Lone Man is pretty happy to have me for company now.

That pretty much wraps up my story. I'm writing this for school but Lone Man says I may have to take some things out because it wouldn't be good to share every detail of my life. He said leave in the good parts and take out the bad. That seems like a good idea. Who wants to hear about so much bad stuff anyway. So now I have to go because Lone Man said we have to talk about my mom and he's coming in my room soon so we can "talk like men." I like the sound of that. I'm going to be twelve soon and it's time to put the Fanner 50 away and do more grown-up stuff. Oh yeah, I live in a whole other state now, in Lone Man's house in a town with lots of people. It's a great place. I like school and there are a lot of other kids in the neighborhood here so I'm making new friends, and we're close to town so I can walk there and even go to movies on Saturday. Oh, and Lone Man has a color television but most of the shows are still black and white except for Disney and that's just for kids. But I did get to see Ben Casey and Jimmy was right, all of his patients have a "subdural hematoma" every week. It's pretty funny. I have to go now. Lone Man, I mean grandpa, just came in and sat down. He has some papers in his hand and looks very serious, but I'm really excited to hear all about my mom. It's only a guess, but I think he may have finally found her.