

Power Lines
Tracy Daugherty

In the fall of 1967 Bucky Dean quarterbacked the Midland Lee Rebels to eight straight victories and a shot at the state high school championship. In the spring he received his draft notice and was headed to Vietnam. The town mourned while celebrating his patriotism and courage. I turned ten that summer, the day after Sirhan pulled the trigger on Bobby Kennedy. In still moments, when I thought about it, I felt something of the volatility of American politics, and the fear that Vietnam had become a "quagmire" (a new word for me that year) threatening one day to swallow my pals and me.

The Rebs didn't go far in the playoffs, but Bucky remained my hero. Through a friend of a friend my dad arranged for him to come to our house one night to sign autographs for me and my buddy Pat. Up close, Bucky was gangly and tall with a rash of pimples on each of his cheeks. Pat and I didn't speak. We sat at his feet, holding out paper and pens. My sister and her friend Michelle, both twelve, laughed at us on their way out the door. "Dorks," Janey said.

Bucky seemed embarrassed, hunching his shoulders, shifting his weight; apparently, he hadn't got used to adulation though my dad said every car dealer in town was waiting to use his face in its newspaper ads. They hankered for him to turn pro, maybe with the Cowboys or the Oilers, so they could recruit him for endorsements--surely, when the neon lit him up he wouldn't forget his hometown. The war was just an inconvenient break in the Bucky Dean saga.

"When you shipping out?" Dad asked.

Bucky etched his name on a sheet of notepaper. "Headed to Fort Bliss in early June, sir, right after graduation. ABAR maintenance training."

"I was in the Navy myself."

"That so?" He knelt and handed me the autograph. "You gonna be a star passer?"

"Sure," I said, though I was asthmatic and, except for Pat, the least athletic boy in our school.