

Eddie, The Freshman Year

Chapter One The First Weeks

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With the Summer coming to a close, and school about ready to start, Eddie will soon meet up again with his friends. The talk during the first day of school will invariably be the usual, “what did you do over the Summer,” type of gibberish. All the students will be checking out everyone else’s wardrobes. The seniors will be watching carefully to see who now drives to school instead of taking the bus. The upperclassmen will be checking out the freshmen, and vice versa. Some of the track team members, particularly a guy named Paul Mahoney, will be looking for two guys named Eddie and Mark. Mahoney has heard rumors of their speed, which he has a very hard time believing. None of this, however, concerns Eddie, who lives in his own world.

Last year, Paul Mahoney was the star of the high school track team. Mahoney is on his way to getting a scholarship in track, which he hopes to procure early in the season. Mahoney’s primary events are the short sprints, and the 4 by 440 relay. Last year, Mahoney and his track buddy, Darryl Bell, were accompanied by two seniors in the 4 by 440 relay, both of who were faster than Mahoney or Bell. This year, Mahoney feels that he is entitled to run whatever race he chooses simply because he is the senior member of the team. Anyone who comes along to threaten that entitlement will certainly not be Mahoney’s friend.

On the day before school starts, while out on a ride, Eddie encounters Mark running along the road. Mark, who had a good run up the path along the parkway, is now on his way home. With less than a quarter of a mile left to go, Mark starts to walk. Eddie gets off of his bicycle and walks with him. The two friends talk, mostly about what they’ve done over the Summer. Mark, whose father had taken him out on quite a few jobs, tells Eddie he made a lot of money this Summer. Mark also tells Eddie he is saving up for a good bicycle. Eddie tells Mark that it would be easier to get to the beach if he had a better bicycle. Eddie’s comment provided

Mark even more incentive to buy one before next Spring. When they arrive at Mark's house, they talk for a little while longer, and Eddie heads home.

When Eddie gets home, his mother immediately asks him, "hey, Eddie. Are you ready for school tomorrow?" Eddie, not knowing whether he is ready or not, tells her, "I guess so." She asks, "do you need anything?" Eddie answers her, "I guess I'll find out tomorrow." Eddie's mother is not too concerned with Eddie being prepared for the first day. Nothing much happens for the first few days of school anyway. Everyone knows that but, nevertheless, both the parents and students get stressed about it.

The big day finally arrives. Eddie's mother proudly wakes him up herself because this is her son's first day of high school. Slow to get moving, Eddie has been waking up at 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. over the Summer, not 6:00 a.m. like he does today. Eddie's mother serves him a good breakfast, which he eats while she makes him a healthy lunch. As she makes him a sandwich on homemade whole grain bread, she asks if he wants anything special. Eddie asks for some cantaloupe, cut up, and placed in Tupperware, because it is easier to eat that way. Also asking for a bag of sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds, Eddie is clearly not your typical fourteen-year-old.

Eddie heads out to the bus stop, where the upperclassmen and freshmen congregate in two separate groups. This is not too unusual to see during the first week of school. The division will break down in a week or two. Since the school is only a little more than one mile away, Eddie could have just as easily walked. At the bus stop, the typical conversation ensues. The students secretly check out what everyone is wearing, and looking over the new guys. A few of the seniors are absent from the bus stop today, such as Ralph, and will be for the rest of the year. They are driving their cars to school, which is not very far away, just because they can.

The bus arrives, and everyone gets on. The upperclassmen get on the bus first, claiming the better seats, not that any seat on a school bus is really good. At each bus stop, everyone entering the bus is carefully checked out, which is typical for the first few days of school. When the bus finally arrives at school, everyone gets off the bus as if it were a fire drill. In the front of the school, a few small groups of friends, who haven't seen each other all Summer, meet together. Some students go inside, and others wander around aimlessly, trying to figure out where to go.

As Eddie enters the school, he walks up to Mark and Bobby B., who are standing around looking for someone they might know. The three guys compare their schedules, and it looks like they have some of the same classes together. One realization that is immediately evident is that they

all have gym class during eighth period, which prompts for immediate celebration and high-fives. They also all have the first period class together, which is English. The teacher is Miss Kristen Starr, one of the most liked teachers in the school. First period also doubles as the home room class, where attendance is taken. The big challenge of the morning is to find room 117, which should not be too hard. Eddie, Mark, and Bobby B. walk around the halls for a while, and eventually find the room.

Eddie and his friends walk into the classroom, and immediately see Axel Braden sitting near the window with Wendy. Mark yells out, “yo bro,” as he is looking at Braden across the room. Braden immediately responds, “this is high school. Who let you guys in?” Eddie yells back to Braden, “I tried to sign up for eight periods of gym class, but they wouldn’t let me. So here I am.” They all have a good laugh, while the rest of the class is marginally entertained. They all sit together, leaving no doubt which side of the classroom will be the center of attention.

The background noise in the classroom immediately comes to a halt when the English teacher, Miss Starr, enters the room. The twenty-five year old teacher, who looks like her wardrobe is from Saks Fifth Avenue, seems to command immediate attention just by her presence. Miss Starr informs the class, “this is ninth grade English slash home room. Please check your schedules and make sure you are in the right place.”

Just then, a student in the back mutters something unintelligible, prompting Miss Starr to respond firmly, “let’s get something straight. When I am speaking, you are to listen.” Miss Starr, looking at the offender, continues, “if that is too difficult, I will arrange a meeting for you after school, commonly known as detention.” That incident put an immediate end to any misbehavior in Miss Starr’s English class.

Miss Starr, while taking attendance, is probably the first teacher to pronounce Mark’s and Eddie’s last names correctly. But, after all, she is an English teacher. The rest of the class goes very well and, by the end of the class, everyone is convinced that Miss Starr is a very amiable person. The bell rings, and it’s off to the next class.

For Eddie, and some of his friends, the final class of the day is gym class. On the first day, the class meets in the gym. With a mixture of freshmen and sophomores, the students sit on the bleachers with others in their grade. The instructor, Mr. Frazier, walks in and introduces himself.

Mr. Frazier gets down to business and begins lecturing the class. His presentation begins, “you have to be at work on time, and the train leaves in six minutes. You live one mile from the train station. Your car doesn’t start. Are you going to make it to work that day?” Raising another

hypothetical question, Mr. Frazier asks, “there’s a 100-pound rock blocking your driveway. Are you strong enough to move it? Or, will you get a hernia trying to lift it?” Mr. Frazier comically adds, “or, maybe you’ll have to call me to move it for you! And, I’ll charge you to move that rock!”

Explaining his ultimate goal to the class, Mr. Frazier explains, “my goal is to get you to the train station on time and make sure you can move that rock! If I can get you to the station on time, and get you to move that rock, you will get a passing grade. If I cannot get you to the station on time, or you cannot move that rock, then I have failed. But, if I fail, you are the one that will receive the failing grade, not me!” This is not exactly what the students were expecting to hear on the first day of gym class.

While Mr. Frazier is lecturing the class on the benefits of physical fitness, the sophomores look around the room, checking out the freshmen. The sophomores are aware that Mr. Frazier will coordinate the introductory freshmen versus sophomores football game during the next gym class later this week. This match up will catch the freshmen by surprise. The sophomores fully intend to let the freshmen know who’s boss once the competition starts.

Eddie, Mark, Bobby B., and Braden, all sitting together, somehow landed in the same gym class. Daniel Gaspari, also known as Gump, sits with Eddie and his friends. Gump is a football player and a wrestler, with good all-around athletic ability. Some of the sophomores, looking in the direction of Eddie and his crew, wonder how some of the freshmen have been allotted more than their fair share of muscle. The sophomores, however, will find out later whether Eddie and his crew have what it takes to compete with the upperclassmen.

At the end of the school day, Eddie decides to walk home with Bobby B., the doctor of the shot-put, rather than take the bus. After crossing the four-lane road, the trip to Eddie’s house will be on all side streets. Bobby B. lives less than a half mile from the school, so walking will be his usual regimen. On the way home, they talk mostly about the day, and that high school doesn’t seem like it will be too difficult.

As they turn the corner, they see Gary Mitchell, their track teammate, being harassed by two upperclassmen. There are a few bystanders, who are secretly hoping and waiting for a fight to break out. The high school is known for its hazing of freshmen, which Eddie and Bobby B. just walked into, witnessing it first hand. It appears that Gary is today’s target. They quickly figure out what’s going on, and come up to Gary and his presumed adversaries.

Eddie asks Gary, “what’s going on here?” Before Gary could answer, one of the thugs takes control of the conversation. With a threatening tone of voice, one of the troublemakers asks Eddie and Bobby B., “you two freshmen?” Eddie replies, “yeah, junior. What are you going to do about it?” The thug comes up to Eddie, and attempts to deliver a punch to his mid-section. The shot doc is standing by with his arms crossed, ready to intervene if necessary. Eddie quickly grabs the aggressor’s arm, turns him around, placing him in an arm bar. Giving the instigator a swift kick to the back of his knee, Eddie pushes the locked arm forward. This lands the thug face down on the pavement.

Gary, Bobby B., and Eddie all stand together as the thug gets up. Eddie questions those standing around, asking, “who’s next?” With no one stepping up to challenge Eddie, Bobby B. laughs, and comments, “it looks like they’ve turned into a bunch of chickens.” Wisely, there are no other challengers today. The crowd disperses, walking away with the knowledge that there are a few in the freshman class who are best not antagonized. Eddie, Gary, and Bobby B. all walk home together, knowing tomorrow will be a better day.

Two days later, in gym class, is the match-up between freshmen and sophomores. As the students dress for class in the locker room, Mr. Frazier, the gym teacher, announces today’s grand activity. “Today we are playing football,” announces Mr. Frazier, in an energetic upbeat tone. Mr. Frazier informs everyone, “the freshmen will compete against the sophomores! Get ready, and be out on the field in five minutes, and have your team captain picked before you get out on the field.”

A lot of chatter rises in the locker room. The sophomores are all discussing how they are going to destroy the freshmen. Some of the freshmen, somewhat discouraged, are talking amongst themselves about how the match up is not fair. Not all freshmen, however, are discouraged. Braden, with his usual enthusiasm, rants, “we’re gonna kick ass! We’re gonna kick a lot of sophomore ass today! Something is finally going my way!” Braden’s exuberance fires up Mark, Bobby B., Eddie, and Daniel Gaspari, known to his friends as Gump. Some of the sophomores, looking over at Braden and his 42-inch chest, are already beginning to feel as if they’ve been beaten.

On the field, Mr. Frazier quickly instructs the team captains to pick eleven men to start, and the rest will substitute. Mr. Frazier also makes the executive decision that the sophomores will get the ball first. Disappointing to some, Mr. Frazier also announces, “this is touch football, not a game of tackle.” And, as a final note, Mr. Frazier tells the teams, “there will not be a kickoff, but you will start your possession on the 20-yard line. And, there will be no point after attempts.” After all, this is gym class, not a varsity football game.

Gump has been chosen by the freshmen to be the team captain since he is on the football team. Although Gump is an outside linebacker, he is more or less an all-around athlete. Gump is also a wrestler, competing in the 182-pound weight class. During the football season he weighs in at about 190 to 200 pounds. Gump could earn a spot on just about any team the school has to offer, but he primarily sticks to his strengths, which are football and wrestling.

The sophomore's team captain is Anthony Ambrosini, who is also on the football team. Playing running back and occasionally wide receiver, Ambrosini looks like a throw back from the sixties. With his long dark hair, if dressed in a tank top and leather jacket, he'd appear to belong to the cast of the movie *Grease*. Although he is second string in football this year, Ambrosini has the potential to be a good athlete. Ambrosini's big hindrance is that he occasionally cannot keep his emotions under control on the sports field.

Gump, well aware of Eddie and Mark's speed and agility from the Kill the Man with the Ball games, announces, "Eddie and Mark, you both play safety." Gump continues, "Bobby, you play middle linebacker, and bury their quarterback. Me and Braden will be the cornerbacks. I'll take the right side. Everyone else, get on the line." Some of the students were looking at Gump as if he were speaking a foreign language. The core team, to whom Gump assigned positions, understand their assignments well. Gump instructs two or three of the less athletic students as to where they should be positioned. The sophomore offense gets set and everyone is ready to play.

Mr. Frazier blows his whistle, and instructs the teams to begin play. The ball is snapped, and Ambrosini, the sophomore quarterback, throws a quick screen pass to the tight end. Gump is right there to knock the ball down, resulting in no gain. Ambrosini quickly recognizes that Gump and Braden pose a slight problem.

For the next play, Ambrosini calls for a long pass. The ball is quickly snapped again, with the sophomores trying to catch the defense off guard and show them who is boss. With Bobby B. putting pressure on the quarterback, the ball is haphazardly thrown to a receiver running deep to the left. Mark chases the receiver down, jumps in front of him, and intercepts the ball. With no hesitation, Mark is headed straight to the end zone, encountering a crowd headed his way. Mark quickly breaks to the right, where Eddie and Gump are blocking the defenders, leaving a clear path for him to the end zone. Mark scores a touchdown and, after two plays, the freshmen are ahead six to nothing.

Mr. Frazier tells the sophomore offense, in an attempt to raise their energy level, "you're the offense! You're supposed to be scoring points,

not playing defense!” The sophomores get into a huddle, where Ambrosini looks at the freshman defense, trying to spot a weakness. The freshmen appear ready for whatever Ambrosini has to deliver. But, after the last play, the sophomores are taking a little more time planning their second possession.

As the sophomores line up, Ambrosini, their quarterback, surveys the field. Ambrosini snaps the ball, looking for an open receiver. Just then, Bobby B. breaks through the offensive line, buries Ambrosini, and shuts the play down for a loss. Bobby B. apparently forgot that this is a game of touch football, and tells Ambrosini, “sorry, dude.”

The offense, calling the same play, lines up, and quickly snaps the ball in order to catch the defense off guard. Ambrosini throws a long pass to the left wide receiver who is open but, in a split second, is now tightly covered by Eddie. Eddie intercepts the ball, and immediately runs to a vacant area of the field. Looking for a path to the end zone, Eddie drops back a few yards. Being chased by the sophomore offense, Eddie traverses the field as if he were playing a game of Kill the Man with the Ball. Scrambling and running back and forth and in circles, Eddie has worn out some of the less athletic players who have given up chasing him down. Seeing an opening, Eddie makes a clean break from the pack, running straight toward Ambrosini, who is now protecting the end zone. Ambrosini, who is dumbfounded, runs straight on for Eddie. Eddie quickly breaks to the right, and scores the second touchdown of the game. Eddie ran more than 300 yards to score his touchdown. Only 40 of the 300 yards, however, were in the direction of the goal line.

Quite amused by the last play, Mr. Frazier, looking at Ambrosini, yells out to the sophomores, “they’re creaming you!” Mr. Frazier runs up to join the sophomores in their huddle. This is their third possession of the game, and they have nothing to show thus far. Mr. Frazier instructs them to run the ball, thinking that, at least, they won’t lose it as easily.

The sophomores line up again, this time with an unbalanced line to the right. Gump, playing right cornerback, signals to Braden, who is on the left, to watch for the run. The ball is snapped, and Ambrosini hands off to his running back, who runs to the right. Braden, plowing through a few offensive blockers as if they weren’t even there, stops the run for a small gain. The sophomores try running a few more times, but the speed of Braden, Mark, and Eddie is too much for them to overcome. With the sophomores having to punt the ball, the freshmen finally get to play offense.

Gump, the team’s captain, tells the team that he’ll play quarterback unless someone else wants to give it a try. There are no volunteers, so Gump will be the quarterback. Gump, who played Kill the Man with the

Ball with the group last year, knows that Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Bobby B. can all catch the ball well. Not wanting to leave anyone out of the game plan, Gump asks his team, “does anyone have any ideas?” Mark quickly volunteers, saying, “throw me a short pass, and I’ll see what I can do.” Mark’s response was an understatement, and everyone knows it.

The players get set, with Mark and Eddie playing wide receivers on opposite sides. Before the ball is snapped, the sophomore defense is nervously looking around. Gump takes the snap, and within two seconds, throws the ball to Mark. Knowing Mark’s speed, Gump aims a few yards in front of Mark, who is already fifteen yards down the field. Mark, who has already left the sophomore’s safety in the dust, has a clear shot to the end zone. Mark catches the ball and, with no one remotely close to him, sprints into the end zone, untouched.

With the score at eighteen to zero in the first ten minutes, the sophomores are looking kind of ragged. Mr. Frazier tells the worn out sophomore team captain to substitute some fresher players for tired ones. Pulling Eddie, Mark, and Braden from the freshman lineup, Mr. Frazier also calls for substitutions for the three freshmen players. He then tells the teams to continue to play.

Taking Eddie, Mark, and Braden to the oval track on the other side of the schoolyard, Mr. Frazier tells the three track stars, “you’re going to run a 440-yard dash for time.” Mark pipes up, and mentions, “I thought we were playing football today.” Mr. Frazier responds, “you’ll get back to the game in a few minutes. This is more important.” Recognizing Eddie, Mark, and Braden from last year’s middle school track meet, Mr. Frazier wants to see how well they perform. As he inspects his stopwatch, Mr. Frazier firmly tells them, “I want the best run you can do. No slacking off.”

Although Mr. Frazier has many stopwatches, his Tag Heuer vintage timepiece accurate to 1/100 second, and his Swiss-made Leonidas stopwatch are hanging around his neck today on sterling silver chains. They say that Mr. Frazier has two wives, one is named Dawn, and the other one is his stopwatch. Some of the students even say that Mr. Frazier is the reincarnation of the Greek god Chronos, for he is always timing something.

Rarely do Eddie, Mark, and Braden race each other outside of formal competition, so this race will prove interesting. Eddie, Mark, and Braden get lined up, and are ready to go. Mr. Frazier, with his stopwatch in his hand, announces, “on your marks.” The three runners get prepared to run. Mr. Frazier then announces, “set,” and, after the runners are all in the “set” position, announces, “go.” The three freshmen are off, as a few of the football players gaze over at the three runners, wondering what is

going on. Unknown to anyone in the gym class, many bored students sitting in their classrooms are also watching the activities out on the field.

The three runners leave the starting line as if they are running a 100-yard dash. At 100 yards, Mark and Eddie take a slight lead, with Braden two steps behind them. The 440-yard run is Braden's race so, although he is slightly behind, it is best not to underestimate him. At 150 yards, the runners slow their pace a bit, as to not burn themselves out. Halfway around the track, it is Mark, Eddie, and Braden, in that order. Barely two steps separate any two of them. Mr. Frazier looks down at his stopwatch at the halfway mark, already knowing that this is going to be a good run. Passing the 220-yard mark, Braden makes a move, passing Eddie, and comes up behind Mark. Eddie is not about to finish last, so he turns on the juice, and passes Mark. Mark, likewise, is not about to lose, so he catches up with Eddie and Braden. Eddie, Mark, and Braden, coming around the curve into the final straightaway, are all head to head. Each one wants to win, and each one refuses to lose.

The final 75 yards is a sprint to the finish. Still head to head with 50 yards to go, there is no clear sign of a winner yet. With 25 yards left, Braden slowly takes the lead by about two steps. Eddie and Mark are still head to head, neither showing any weakness. Braden crosses the finish line first, as Mr. Frazier presses the button on his stopwatch. Braden is followed by Eddie and Mark, who were barely two steps behind, which is only a tenth of a second or so at this pace. Mr. Frazier looks at his stopwatch, exclaiming over and over, "that was a 54 quarter! A 54 quarter!" And, the three guys who delivered the performance are all freshmen.

While Eddie, Mark, and Braden ran the 440-yard dash, the football game had momentarily stopped, and both teams turned their focus toward the race. The girls, playing soccer on the adjacent field, were also distracted by the race. As the runners walk to cool down, Mr. Frazier jogs up to them, repeating their time, "that was a 54-second quarter mile! A 54-second quarter mile! Can you believe it? Great run! Great run!" Eddie, Mark, and Braden exchange high-fives and fist bumps. Mr. Frazier tells Eddie, Mark, and Braden they can return to the football game after the next play.

During the next play, on the sidelines, Mr. Frazier again conveys to Eddie, Mark, and Braden how impressed he is with their performance on the track. After the play is over, Mr. Frazier yells out to the sophomores, "these guys just ran a 54-second quarter mile! They're worn out, so maybe now you can score a few points!"

Eddie, Mark, and Braden go in, not quite fully recovered from the quarter mile race they just ran. The score is still eighteen to zero, and the

sophomores have the ball. Ambrosini snaps the ball, and throws a deep pass to a receiver in the vicinity of Eddie. Fatigued from the race, Eddie runs up behind the receiver and punches the ball into the air with his fist. Eddie made no effort to catch the ball. Still not fully recovered from the race, he just wanted to shut down the play. Mark, who is also in the area, catches the airborne ball and just stands there for a second or two. Quickly approached by an offense that has now reverted into defensive mode, Mark laterals the ball back to Eddie. Eddie, who is now alone on his side of the field, catches the ball and sprints to the end zone for yet another touchdown. The score is now twenty-four to zero.

The last interception did not sit well with the sophomore's quarterback, Anthony Ambrosini. Ambrosini, quite disgusted, looks over at Eddie as he returns from the end zone, and asks, "what kind of tribe are you running?" Eddie grins, and replies emphatically, "that's my tribe, junior! Don't mess with them." When Eddie calls someone "junior," it is his way of telling them they really need to step up their game. From then on, Eddie, Mark, Axel Braden, Robert Bradshaw, Gary Mitchell, and Eric Johnson will be known as *Eddie's Tribe*, or just *The Tribe*.

The remainder of the game was pretty much the same story. The sophomores didn't score a single touchdown that day, with the final score being forty-two to zero. Mr. Frazier was too self-absorbed with Eddie, Mark, and Braden's phenomenal 54-second quarter mile to care about the outcome of the game. On the way back to the locker room, the sophomores did not have much to say to the freshmen. The freshmen, however, had cause for celebration, for they were supposed to lose this game, and lose it in a big way.

One person, however, has a score to settle. Anthony Ambrosini, the team's captain and quarterback, is quite embarrassed by the loss. He is determined to redeem himself in a future competition against Eddie and his tribe.

The next day, word got around the school about the freshmen versus sophomore football game and the 54-second quarter mile. The game proved quite entertaining to all who had a view from the school building. Mr. Moreno, the football coach, who teaches history, had a good view of the game from his classroom window. While attempting to teach, Mr. Moreno was quite distracted by the game. The play of the game was Eddie's 300-yard run all over the field to score a touchdown. What Eddie, Mr. Frazier, and the rest of the gym class did not know was that, in a few of the classrooms, the teachers and students came up to the window and watched them play. There is no doubt there was a discussion about that game in the teacher's lounge after that gym class.

The first few days of the school week went a little rough, but the days eventually got a lot better, with the rest of the week going very well. Since it was the first week of school, not too much was expected academically from any of the students. By the end of the week everyone had their schedules all sorted out and extracurricular activities were in full swing. Best of all, Eddie, Mark, Bobby B., Braden, and Gump all undoubtedly locked in an A in gym class.

Eddie takes advantage of the time after school to continue buying gold. With the money he brought back from the future, he could buy about 48 ounces of gold. Over the past few weeks, Eddie noticed the price of gold was inching up very slowly. While out riding one day, Eddie found a third place to buy gold. In a local department store, there is a coin and stamp counter. The prices in the department store are a bit higher, but gave the advantage that he would not be frequenting the same places every time he buys gold. In the department store, there is also the advantage that a different clerk is on duty each day.

After school one day, Eddie returns to the school on his bicycle to check out the Autumn sports teams. Eddie was not interested in either football or soccer but, since his friend, Gary Mitchell, is on the cross country team, Eddie thought he'd check out what goes on after school. The cross country team usually runs along a three-mile loop on the roads behind the school. Eddie is not a distance runner, and would rather ride his bicycle for 50 miles as opposed to running three miles, the distance of high school cross country competition. With no sign of the cross country team on the school grounds, Eddie rides along the three-mile loop.

Halfway around the loop is a small pond, which Eddie has passed many times before on his bicycle. As Eddie approaches the pond, he can see the runners across the water. As Eddie gets closer, he notices there are about six runners in the pack. There is, however, no sign of Mitchell. Catching up to the pack, Eddie sees another group of four runners a little farther ahead. And, there is Mitchell, in the middle of the front pack. Passing the trailing group of runners, Eddie approaches the four runners in front. As he passes Mitchell, Eddie yells out to him, "hey Mitchell! When are you going to start running?" That was all Mitchell needed to hear to pour on a little more speed and press the pack to run faster. Eddie then rides his bicycle back to the school, to see what else may be going on.

When Eddie gets back to the school, he turns into the parking lot through a narrow walking path that serves as a short cut for students who walk to school. This is the same path Eddie takes when he walks home. At the far side of the lot, where the students are allowed to park, he sees Ralph, the honor student. Ralph and another guy appear to be looking at

the tires on Ralph's Volkswagen Beetle. Eddie mentions to himself, "wow, Ralph got himself a VW Bug. Cool."

As Eddie gets a little closer, he quickly realizes the guy with Ralph is not admiring the tires or workmanship of Ralph's vehicle, but rather letting the air out of one of the rear tires. Deflating the tires is some moron named Steven Wagner. Wagner, at five feet, seven inches tall and 125 pounds is too much of an opponent for Ralph, who is five feet, eight inches tall and weighs about 105 pounds. Wagner, being kind of scrawny, is limited to picking on the low hanging fruit. Ralph is telling Wagner to stop, but Wagner pushes him away, and continues with his nasty deed.

Riding up, Eddie gets off of his bicycle, and props it up against the fence. Walking up to the car, Eddie asks Ralph, "do you need any help?" Wagner replies, "yeah. You can start letting the air out of the other tires." Eddie responds authoritatively, "not you, pinion head. I was talking to Ralph!"

Standing behind the pinion head, as Eddie so kindly named Wagner, Eddie tells him to stand up. Putting Wagner in an arm lock, Eddie firmly tells him, "this is an automobile, junior. You don't let the air out of the tires unless you are going to pop the tire off the rim and put on a new one. Got it?" Wagner, struggling to escape from the arm lock, responds, "who the hell are you?" Eddie replies, "I am Eddie, the Mechanic, and don't you forget it."

Eddie tells Ralph to get the pump from his bicycle. Ralph hands Eddie the pump. Eddie, pushing Wagner to the ground, tells him, "sit down, junior, and don't even think about moving." Eddie fastens the pump to the tire, and tells Wagner, "start pumping, pinion head!" Wagner, beginning to speak, says, "I'm going to kick." Before Wagner can finish his sentence, Eddie interrupts, and exclaims, "I said start pumping!" Looking up at Eddie, and his five-foot, nine-inch, 170-pound muscular frame, Wagner is left with little choice. Wagner reluctantly starts re-inflating the tire that he was caught maliciously deflating.

Eddie stands along side Ralph, with his arms crossed, watching Wagner pump up the tire. Ralph thanks Eddie for helping him out. Ralph also takes the opportunity to apologize to Eddie for treating him so rudely when Eddie asked about the math problem over the Summer. While Wagner is pumping up the tire, Eddie mentions to Ralph that it should take him a good half an hour or more. Eddie asks Ralph, "what's the matter with this guy anyway?" Ralph responds, "he's just basically a jerk." Wagner, who is quite angry, begins to yell out, "just shut." Wagner is quickly interrupted by Eddie, who sternly tells Wagner, "shut up and pump, junior! Pump! Pump!"

After fifteen minutes goes by, Wagner is still not finished, and is showing signs of fatigue. Wagner, whining like a baby, tells Eddie, "I can't pump anymore! My arm's giving out!" Fed up with Wagner's poor conditioning, Eddie tells Wagner, "you got another arm. Use it, junior." Eddie then asks Ralph if he has a tire gauge. Ralph gets the tire gauge out of the glove box, and hands it to Eddie. Removing the pump from the tire, Eddie checks the pressure. Eddie announces, "twenty-two pounds. Only five more to go. It looks like you got a lot more pumping to do, junior." Full of compassion, Eddie fastens the pump to the left side of the tire valve, so Wagner can use his left arm to pump. Wagner continues pumping for another ten minutes.

Anyone who's tried to pump up an automobile tire with a frame-mounted bicycle pump knows that it is faster to roll the tire to the closest service station, fill it up, and roll it back.

After a while, Eddie tells Ralph, "let's check the pressure again." Wagner moves over as Eddie removes the pump and Ralph checks the pressure. Wagner nearly panics, hearing a little precious air escape while Ralph checks the tire pressure. Ralph announces, "twenty-eight pounds. It should be twenty-seven." Eddie instructs Ralph, "let a little out." Eddie looks over to Wagner, telling him, "shut up," before he even has a chance to speak. If Ralph accidentally lets out too much air, it's a sure bet Wagner will be pumping again. Ralph gets the pressure set at exactly twenty-seven pounds. Eddie then tells Ralph to check the other three tires. Still being obstinate, Wagner begins to say, "I'm not pumping," again interrupted by Eddie, who responds, "oh yeah, you will be!"

Ralph verifies the tires are all at the correct pressure. Wagner, who will probably not be able to move his arms for a few days, is relieved to some degree. Grabbing Wagner by the arm again, Eddie warns him, "if I ever catch you touching this car again, you're going to wish it ran over you compared to what I'm going to do to you! Got it?" Wagner, in pain from the arm lock, responds, "yeah! Yeah! I got it! I got it!" Eddie tells Wagner, "good!" Eddie gives Wagner a firm shove, and Wagner leaves the scene as fast as possible.

Eddie tells Ralph, "I bet he won't be letting air out of tires anymore." Ralph again thanks Eddie for helping him. Eddie reassures Ralph, "if he bothers you again, let me know." Ralph gets in his car and drives home. Eddie, riding home on his bicycle, passes Ralph on the road. From that day on, Eddie has been known as Eddie the Mechanic.

Wagner's nasty deed earned for him an interesting nickname at school. Pumping the tire up for more than a half hour with Eddie's bicycle pump, Wagner's biceps and elbows were so sore and inflamed that he could not fully extend his arms. Walking around school with his arms

bent at a 90-degree angle, Wagner's arms looked like the front legs of a Tyrannosaurus Rex. For the rest of the school year, Wagner was known as "T-Rex".