

Eddie, The Ten Year Reunion

Chapter One New Projects

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It's been nearly ten years since Eddie and most of the tribe have walked the halls of Northside High School. Not much has changed at the high school over the years, except for, perhaps, several teachers and administrators who are no longer around and a few new faces in the front of the classrooms. Among those who are now history is the former principal, Mr. Crum, who did everything in his power to prevent Eddie from graduating from high school. Also, not seen in a long time walking the halls of the high school is Mr. O'Brien, whose unscrupulous activities included failing athletes for personal financial gain.

The high school track where Eddie and the rest of the tribe made history was removed as soon as school let out for the Summer. In the red zone, the grass is all gone, and all that remains in the center of the oval track is dirt. The bleachers have been removed, as have the team benches. The curb that Mark and Louis Zaino put a lot of effort to install six years ago offers a subtle hint that there was once a track in the area that now looks so barren.

Summer school lets out for the day, and Eric Johnson, now the head track coach at Northside High School, walks out to where the track once was. Staring out at the desolate grounds, a bit of sadness comes over the former track star. Recalling his years when he once ran for Northside High School, Johnson realizes that he will never again see the old gravel track that hosted victory after victory for his own high school team and the teams he has coached. All that remains of the now defunct venue are a few photographs of the meets and memories in Johnson's mind.

A voice is heard from out in a distance, yelling out to Johnson, "what do you think?" Johnson yells back, "it's looking good!" Johnson walks over to where the shot-put pad once was, where Mark is standing alone. Mark tells him, "we're going to start putting the irrigation system in for

the red zone on Monday. John should be here first thing in the morning with his crew.” Eddie’s brother, John, after graduating from the University with a degree in business, now runs a very successful landscaping company.

The demolition of the old track has been completed. Arriving at the job site earlier today, Mark is checking to make sure everything is up to spec before the construction of the new venue begins early next week. Johnson, who is looking forward to the new track, is staying on top of the situation, coming outside every day before he heads home to check on the progress.

Wanting to know what will be transpiring over the next few months, Johnson asks Mark, “what’s the plan, bro? What’s next?” Mark explains, “we work from the inside out. After the irrigation goes in, the pads will be poured for the launching points for the field events. After that, we’ll put in the sod. Then, the company that installs the track will be here. They’ll take care of the track itself, and finish the launching areas. Then, once they’re done, the bleachers and team benches will go in.” Johnson asks, “where’s the VIP section going?” Mark replies, “across from the bleachers on the other side of the track, right near the finish line.” Johnson tells Mark what he’s told him many times before, “I can’t thank you guys enough for this. I really appreciate this.”

Eddie and Mark, making millions of dollars in the stock market and by buying and selling gold, have personally bankrolled the high school’s new track and field venue. Also making a lot of money in the stock market, Bobby B. put up the money for the field area. The new all-weather track and field venue will be a vast improvement over the outdated gravel track that was originally installed thirty years ago. And, within the high school’s division, the new track will be the envy of all the other teams’ coaches.

Identifying a specific area of the venue, Mark informs Johnson, “your bench is going over there, between the storage building and the curve in the track.” Walking over to where the bench will be with Mark, Johnson asks, “my bench? Why specifically here?” Mark explains, “in the afternoon, that area is shaded by the trees. It will give you an advantage on a hot day. And, you’ll have power at your bench so you can use that big ass fan and bring a small refrigerator out here.” Johnson comments, “I didn’t even think about any of that.”

Mark continues to explain, “on this side of the track, the other bench will be near the other curve. The other two benches, for a four-way meet, will be on the other side of the track, in approximately the same area. We’re running power to the other benches as well. Otherwise, they’ll have to bring one mother of an extension cord. And, if there are more than

four teams competing, they'll be some temporary benches that can be brought out." Johnson replies, "awesome!"

Mark asks Johnson, "have you seen Zaino around here recently?" Johnson replies, "yeah. He was around here earlier this week with John and a surveying crew." Mark replies, "good. They were marking where the irrigation lines go." Johnson mentions, "Zaino was asking what you want to do with the pile of gravel from the old track." Mark explains, "we're going to reuse it, and put it deep under the sand track. That will help with drainage. We'll start on that next week sometime." Johnson points out, "you thought of everything." Mark confesses, "actually, Dr. Zunde came up with that idea." Set twenty feet away and parallel to the back straightaway will be a 130-meter long sand track, similar to the one at the University.

Mark tells Johnson, "well, everything here looks good. I'm going to head out and get cleaned up before we head out for pizza tonight." Johnson asks Mark, "are you bringing the kids?" Mark replies, "not tonight. My parents are babysitting. The kids are spending the night there." Johnson tells Mark, "okay, bro. I'll catch you at the pizzeria." Mark gives Johnson a fist bump, and heads home. Johnson, teaching physical education over the Summer to those who failed the class this past year, walks back to the school, glad that it's Friday.

On the other side of town, Eddie is closing up shop, getting ready to go home. Bobby B., who is now a full-fledged mechanic, reminds Eddie, "don't forget. I won't be here next week." Eddie replies, "that's right. You're working with John, over at the high school, putting in the irrigation system." Bobby B. asks, "do you know what he'll be having me doing?" Eddie replies, "yeah. He has a few miles of PVC and polyethylene pipe to lay for the irrigation system, and only has two weeks to get the project done. So, he needs all the help he can get. Johnson's even going to be there after he gets off work to help."

As Eddie is setting the alarm, Bobby B. laughs, and tells Eddie, "I bet I'll be carrying pipe all day. I'll just turn it into a workout." Eddie replies, "you're out of luck, bro. John has a Cushman and a trailer to move the pipe. From what I hear, Wendy will be the runner, driving the Cushman, delivering the pipe and other supplies to the workers." Bobby B. surmises, "someone has to load the trailer with the pipe." Eddie replies, "oh, yeah. That might be you." Bobby B. then mentions, "Wendy always liked driving the Cushman when we were in high school." Eddie sets the alarm, locks the door, and tells Bobby B., "I'll catch you guys at the pizzeria later, bro." Bobby B. replies, "we'll be there."

Over at the University, enjoying a quiet day, Braden stops by to say hello to Mr. Frazier, whom he sees quite often. Making a few rounds in

the late afternoon, Braden knocks on the coach's door, announcing, "how come you're still here?" Mr. Frazier replies, "Athena and I were going over the stats on the incoming freshmen. We're looking really strong for next year." Braden asks, "are you gonna win all the gold medals again this year?" Mr. Frazier replies, "it sure does look that way. We might even stand a chance of winning the gold, silver, and bronze medals in every event, like we did when you guys were seniors." Braden boasts, "I still can't believe we pulled that shit off! Those were good days!"

Braden asks his former coach, "have you been over at the high school recently?" Mr. Frazier replies, "I met Gerhard for lunch one day during finals week, but I haven't been there since school let out for the Summer." Braden informs Mr. Frazier, "Mark has the old track all ripped out. They're gonna start putting the new track in next week." Mr. Frazier confesses, "that old gravel track has certainly seen better days. I'm really happy for Johnson that he'll have a more modern track now." Now accustomed to a state of the art track and field venue at the University, Mr. Frazier now sees the old high school gravel track as quite antiquated. And, after running on the University's track, so does Johnson.

After a casual afternoon conversation, Mr. Frazier tells Braden, "it's Friday. Maybe I should head out and get an early start on the weekend." Braden replies, "my shift is about over. I'm headed out soon too." Mr. Frazier and Braden walk out of the building together, running into Coach Athena Leighton on the way. Braden tells Coach Leighton, "I hear you have a good team coming up this year." Coach Leighton replies, "we do! And, we stand a really good chance of ticking off Dr. Gregory again next season." Braden replies, "good. His dumb ass ain't good for nothing anyway." Over the last few years, Coach Leighton has gotten quite competitive at psychological warfare. The tribe taught her well.

The year after Braden graduated from the University, the sports programs of every college and university in the division were audited, making sure that the requirements are fully met for participation in the division. The University, for some reason, was singled out and put under a high-powered microscope, and extensively probed to an unreasonable extent. Transcripts of the athletes were examined, the curriculum and course work were scrutinized, finances were audited, and the qualifications of the faculty were even brought into question. The auditor's results were even audited by another auditing firm, adding even more fuel to the fire.

Coach Leighton, who held the position of provost during the years for which the University was being audited, was responsible for the University's budget during that time. The new provost, hit with mounds of paperwork concerning the audit during his first month of employment, was completely unprepared for a full scale investigation when he walked

into the position. Having to temporarily resume her duties as provost, Coach Leighton was not very happy during that year. During the audit, Kathy helped Mr. Frazier coach the University's team in the mornings. As it turns out, Dr. Gregory was the person responsible for the full frontal attack on the University's program. Later that year, it was revealed that the University passed the audit with flying colors. Since then, Dr. Gregory has been at the top of the University's shit list.

Mr. Frazier comments, "speaking of Dr. Gregory, I can't wait for the divisional coach's meeting this year." Coach Leighton smiles, and replies, "me either, George. I can't wait to hear what Dr. Gregory is going to complain about this year!" Mr. Frazier laughs, and comments, "hopefully, it won't be about pollen on our track." Braden asks, "what's all this about pollen on the track?" Mr. Frazier explains, "two years ago during the divisional meet, Dr. Gregory complained that there was pollen on the track. It's not like I have any control over the pollen count." Coach Leighton laughs, and exclaims, "did Dr. Gregory ever get ticked off at me!"

Not hearing about this incident, Braden asks, "oh yeah? What happened?" Coach Leighton explains, "Dr. Gregory complained there was pollen on the track that gets kicked up when the runners run. During the 1,500-meter run, one of the athletes on Dr. Gregory's team had a serious asthma attack, and had to be transported to the hospital. Last year, during the annual divisional coach's meeting, Dr. Gregory blamed the guy's asthma attack on the pollen that he alleged to be on our track. So, I pointed out to Dr. Gregory that his runner was at the back of the pack. Then, I told him that, if his runner were more competitive and at the front of the pack where the pollen wasn't being kicked up, he would not have had that problem." Mr. Frazier laughs, and tells Braden, "all the other coaches were laughing! Did Gregory ever get ticked off at that!" Braden laughs, and replies, "I wish I could have been there to hear that!"

Arriving at the door, Braden tells Mr. Frazier and Coach Leighton, "you guys have a good weekend. I'll catch you guys later." Mr. Frazier replies, "you too. And, don't work too hard." Provost Leighton tells Braden, "take it easy. And, have a great weekend." Braden heads back to his patrol car, and will take one more drive around campus before he leaves. Mr. Frazier and Coach Leighton head out for the weekend, which is supposed to be a beautiful one.

Mitchell and Hoffer, both working at the television station where Angela Meadows is now a popular sportscaster, head home together on the train after a long week at work. Discussing current events, Hoffer tells Mitchell, "I can't believe our high school track is gone. It looks so barren out there. I think I'm going to miss the old track." Mitchell replies, "I can get that. But, the new track will be much better. I went back to the high school and ran a few laps on the track during my senior year at the

University. The difference is like night and day. The all-weather surface is much easier to run on.”

Hoffer asks Mitchell, “by the way, how are the plans for the track dedication coming along?” Mitchell replies, “our plans are finalized. The only thing we’re waiting for is to find out the dedication date. Johnson is hoping the track will be finished before school starts. He’s expecting that the dedication will be held during the first week of school. And, Angela is ready.” Hoffer replies, “that makes sense. If it’s done in the middle of the semester, it will get a whole lot less attention.”

After graduating from the University with a master’s degree in communications, Mitchell took a job at the television station where Hoffer and Angela Meadows both work. Taking a year off after graduating high school when he organized and ran in charity races, Mitchell now works with the television station publicizing such events. Often running in the events himself, Mitchell, who has been training like a mad man, is doing what he always wanted to do. Now a nationally seeded runner, Mitchell’s last big event was organizing coverage of the Boston Marathon a few months ago, in which he also ran. Finishing in the top ten, Mitchell ran one of his best races ever.

Mitchell announces, “here’s our stop.” Mitchell and Hoffer get off the train, and head to their vehicles. Hoffer curiously asks Mitchell, “are you ever going to get rid of that Opel?” Mitchell replies, “yeah. When you get rid of your motorcycle.” Hoffer replies, “that’s not happening anytime soon.” Mitchell mentions, “the Opel is a good commuter car, and it still runs good. Besides, if anything happens to it, it’s no big deal. I’ve gotten my money’s worth out of it.” Hoffer starts his motorcycle and tells Mitchell, “I’ll catch you in an hour or so.” Mitchell and Hoffer head home, and get ready for pizza tonight.

Later that evening, the tribe meets at the pizzeria for dinner. Now preferring the formal dining area to the informal side of the establishment, everyone is seated together at one long table. Arianna, the waitress, walks in to take everyone’s order, and asks, “where are all the kids today?” Paula replies, “they’re on vacation.” Arianna asks, “on vacation?” Paula explains, “yeah. That’s what we tell them when they stay overnight at their grandparent’s house.”

While Arianna goes around the table taking orders, Eddie asks Braden, “how was your week, bro?” Braden replies, “at work, it’s going good. I’m ready to enjoy the weekend. At home, though, I got a big problem that’s only getting bigger.” Already suspecting he knows what the problem is, Eddie asks, “what’s going on this time?” Braden explains, “ever since that asshole, Chuckie, moved in across the street from me, there’s been a lot of trouble.” Eddie asks, “what did the Chuckie do this time?” Braden

replies, “somebody set my garbage can on fire in the middle of the night last Wednesday. It was out by the road, and I know it didn’t catch fire all by itself.” Eddie replies, “yeah. That sounds like something the Chuckie would do.”

Wendy tells Eddie, “we have to get the Chuckie out of there somehow. That guy is a menace. Hunter even calls Chuckie the boogie man.” Paula laughs, and asks Wendy, “so, that’s where the boogie man moved to after we bulldozed Second Street?” Wendy replies, “yeah. It’s really funny in a way. Hunter is only two years old, and he points to the Chuckie’s house and says, ‘boogie man lives there.’” Paula comments, “he’s got that right.” Eddie assures Braden, “we’ll figure out a way to get the Chuckie out of there, bro.” Braden replies, “I hope we can. It’s not like the old days where you can just kick someone’s ass, and get away with it.” Mark comments, “ain’t that the truth.”

Chuckie has become very sly in the last few years. The police know Chuckie is up to something illegal, but there is absolutely no trail of evidence. Without evidence, there is nothing the authorities can do. Chuckie’s only documented source of income is from his job, which is a stock clerk at a home improvement store. Certainly not earning a sufficient income to afford the house across the street from Braden, Braden is quite convinced that Chuckie is dealing drugs again.

At the other end of the table, Bobby B. asks Hoffer, “have you seen the high school track recently?” Hoffer replies, “yeah. It looks like a total wasteland.” Erika comments, “I can’t wait until the new track is done. I know where I’ll be training.” Hoffer asks Erika, “don’t they train you enough on the police force?” Erika replies, “no. I sit in a car most of the day. That’s not exactly exercise.” Bobby B. boasts, “Erika always beats the guys in the physical exam. There’s no one who can beat her in the one-mile run.” Erika laughs, and tells everyone listening, “and, I’m going to continue beating them!” Tessa gives Erika a high-five, telling her, “you go, girl!”

Tessa asks Erika, “have you arrested Chuckie’s sister recently?” Erika replies, “no. But, the other day, I pulled her over for driving with a learner’s permit without a licensed driver in the vehicle. There was also another minor in the vehicle.” Tessa asks, “what? There were no parents in the car?” Erika replies, “nope. So, I suspended both of their permits, and made them walk home. Then, Mrs. Black reported me to the police chief. My dad just laughed.” Chuckie’s sister, Lillian, is now a junior in high school. Learning from Andrew Goldstein, Terry Haynes, and her brother, Lillian has turned out to be a real piece of work.

Braden asks Eddie, “what time are we getting together next weekend?” Eddie replies, “somewhere around noon. And, bring Hunter. He’ll have a

lot of fun. He can play in the water with the other kids.” Braden tells Eddie, “I can’t keep his little ass out of the water! All he wants to do is go in the pool. Before breakfast, he wants to go in the pool. When it’s twenty degrees outside, he wants to go in the pool. When it’s bedtime, he wants to go in the pool one more time. And, somebody’s always got to be out there watching him.” Mark suggests, “Mark and Dawn can watch him.” Braden laughs, and replies, “yeah, right. Two three-year-olds watching a two-year-old. I can see how that’s going to go over.” Mark points out, “yeah. But, two three-year-olds equal one six-year-old. They should be able to take care of it.” Mark’s sense of humor and logic have not changed much over the years.

Over dinner, Braden asks Eddie, “what’s the chance that I can get you to build me and Wendy one of those souped-up Volkswagen Busses?” Eddie replies, “we can do that, bro. Bring us a bus, and we’ll get the motor for it.” Braden asks, “how fast will it go?” Eddie replies, “faster than you’d want to drive it, bro. I built one for Richard, using the 3.3 liter engine, and he took it up to 130 miles an hour once. He said it was steady as a rock, but he was afraid to take it any faster than that.” Braden asks, “where did he drive it that fast?” Eddie replies, “on the road along the beach, in the middle of Winter.” Braden asks, “what does it do zero to sixty in?” Eddie replies, “about five seconds.” Braden tells Eddie, “I think I want to get one. It’s kind of hard getting Hunter, and all his stuff, in and out of Wendy’s car.”

Eddie yells down the table to Bobby B., “yo! Bobby B.! Braden wants a bus!” Bobby B. yells back, “what color?” Braden yells back to Bobby B., “blue, to match my Dune Buggy!” Eddie tells Braden, “just pick up a Bus, bro, and we can get started on it.” Eddie and Bobby B. have been modifying Volkswagen Busses for a few years now, and can crank them out quickly. Kurt Richter, the Georgia Tech engineer who helped Eddie with the design, even had Eddie build one for him. Having his own Bus, Kurt made a few modifications, which are now incorporated into Eddie’s new conversions.

Braden laughs, and informs Eddie, “maybe Mr. Crum is gonna bring you his piece of shit Volkswagen Beetle to get it running again.” Eddie replies, “he’s still in jail. And besides, I’m not working on his piece of shit anyway.” Braden informs Eddie, “his ass ain’t gonna be in jail for too much longer. He’s getting out in a few months.” Eddie exclaims, “are you serious, bro?” Braden replies, “yeah. My dad told me about it last weekend.” Eddie comments, “I wonder if he’ll show up at our ten-year reunion.” Braden replies, “I don’t know. That’s still about a year away.” The word quickly gets around the table that Mr. Crum, the irate high school principal who made everyone’s life so miserable, is getting out of prison in a few months. To say the least, no one is happy to hear the news.

Erika asks Kathy, “who else is going to be at the party next weekend?” Kathy replies, “Genise is coming for sure. And, Karen Corey is coming. From the high school, Lena and Lynn Berson will be coming, and so will Louis Zaino. And, you’ll never guess who else will be there!” Erika replies, “hopefully, it’s not one of the troublemakers.” Kathy replies, “nope. Matt Wood is coming. He used to throw the shot-put at the high school.” Erika comments, “yeah. Bobby has mentioned him before. He plays in the NFL now.”

As the pizza party winds down, everyone heads out to their cars. In the parking lot, Kathy asks Paula, “so, are we still on for cracking the geodes open sometime?” Kathy replies, “yeah. Eddie took one of them to his chiropractor. The chiropractor x-rayed the geode, and there are a lot of stones inside.” Paula whispers, “I really hope they’re yellow, blue, and red stones.” Kathy whispers back, “me too.” Paula tells Kathy, “I’ll catch you later.” Everyone drives home, only to meet up again next weekend, if not sooner.

The next week, on Monday, Eddie arrives at Eddie’s Service Station, and will be working alone this week. Bobby B. is over at the high school, helping Eddie’s brother install the irrigation system for the field events area. Taking a seat in the office, Eddie reviews the three stocks that he is recommending that his friends purchase this month. While Eddie knows his stock picks will increase in value, Eddie also knows that, in about two and a half years, a crash will occur. Fortunately, Eddie will forewarn his friends of the looming disaster before it occurs.

Before any customers show up, Athena Leighton drives into the service station. Athena, with a bachelor’s degree in Exercise Science, a master’s degree in business administration, and a doctorate degree in finance, has traded her administrative world for a position as a physical education instructor at the University. Since Eddie has been giving Athena stock market advice, Athena and her husband, Mike, have made an enormous amount of money in the stock market. Athena’s husband, with a degree in finance, still cannot figure out how Eddie’s stock picks never fail.

Walking in with a smile, Athena announces, “I’m really glad I don’t work eight to five anymore.” Eddie asks, “do you have an easy Summer?” Athena replies, “I do. I’m only teaching two classes during the Summer semester. One is track. The other is field. And, I have a few students for whom I am their faculty advisor for their master’s and Ph.D. But, fortunately, they don’t consume much of my time.” Eddie replies, “that’s about as easy as it gets.”

Eddie asks Athena, “are there any interesting thesis topics?” Athena replies, “as a matter of fact, yes. One of the students who was on the

track team, Laurie King, is doing research on leaving the starting blocks.” Now curious, Eddie replies, “really? Tell me about it.” Athena explains, “theoretically, in a well-conditioned and well-developed athlete, it should not matter which foot is forward in the blocks. In relying on the ‘strong leg’ or ‘fast leg’ as they are commonly referred to, an imbalance develops which, as we all know, is of no benefit to any world class athlete. Continuing to accommodate for a strong or fast leg perpetuates any acquired imbalance. Laurie is researching methods to correct the imbalance.”

Eddie asks, “what made Laurie decide to research that topic?” Athena replies, “we have a hurdler on the team, Paul Harrison, who, because of his height and speed, goes over the first hurdle leading with his right leg, and the second hurdle leading with his left leg. And, he alternates during the entire race. Paul has neither a strong nor fast leg. They are both equally developed, both physically and neurologically. And, he is the fastest on the team out of the blocks. Paul was the impetus for the thesis.”

Now curious, Eddie asks, “does Paul win?” Athena replies, “always. In the hurdles, the hurdler must have a stride perfectly suited to the distance between hurdles. It is absurd to believe that a five-foot eight-inch runner and a six-foot five-inch runner have the same stride length. For example, in the 400-meter hurdles, most hurdlers take fourteen steps between hurdles. But, what happens if, say, for example, at the runners top speed, it would only take thirteen steps? The runner would have to either compromise their speed or alternate legs.” Eddie replies, “I can see that. So, someone running at their top speed with thirteen and a half steps between hurdles would probably make a lousy hurdler.” Athena agrees, telling Eddie, “they’d have to compensate somehow. So, yes. They’d likely lose because they cannot achieve their optimal performance due to the physical constraint of the distance between each hurdle.”

Eddie observes, “you and Mr. Frazier sound like you’re doing a lot of research.” Athena replies, “we are. We are primarily focusing on those areas that have been historically deemed as normal by track and field experts. We feel that certain concepts, such as the ‘fast leg’ and ‘strong leg’ out of the blocks, the ‘leading leg’ in the hurdles, and the strategy in distance races, all need to be revisited.”

Athena then comments, “for some of this research, we have Gary Mitchell to thank.” Eddie asks, “really? How so?” Athena explains, “Gary knew exactly how my son, Darryl, ran the mile. After you guys graduated, Darryl practiced with the team during one year. During that year, Darryl discovered that, by changing his strategy, his 1,500-meter time could vary by as much as ten seconds. He eventually found the perfect strategy and, in running his own race, was able to win the gold medal at the Olympics.”

Eddie replies, "I remember that. We all watched him on TV last year." Athena then explains, "after George's commencement address during your graduation, we have focused on the athletes running their own race." Eddie replies, "just like Mitchell always did." Athena agrees, complimenting Eddie, "when you guys ran for the University, all of you were way ahead of the curve." Truth is, that when Eddie and the tribe ran in high school, they were all way ahead of the curve.

Eddie asks, "how does next year look?" Athena replies, "George and I are quite confident that we'll be back to winning all the medals. We definitely have a high probability of winning all the gold medals at both divisional meets." Eddie replies, "that's awesome!" Athena explains, "to George, only the gold medals count. The year after you guys graduated, at the annual coach's meeting, the other coaches were furious when our team won all the medals. Since then, George really looks forward to listening to them whine and complain at the meeting." Eddie laughs, and replies, "I can see that. Mr. Frazier really hates to lose." Athena tells Eddie, "so do I."

During Eddie and Athena's conversation, Captain Richard Hayes drives up and walks into the office, asking Eddie, "what's up?" Eddie replies, "what's up?" Athena asks, "Captain Hayes! How have you been?" Richard replies, "I've been really good. And you, Provost Leighton?" Athena replies, "I've been great. But, I'm not provost of the University anymore." Richard replies, "I knew that. I just keep forgetting."

Eddie hands Athena and Richard the most recent list of stocks to buy and sell, and asks, "is everything with the stocks working out okay for you guys?" Athena replies, "it is. Thank you very much again for your investment advice. It's like you already have tomorrow's newspaper." Eddie sighs, and replies, "you found out my secret!" Athena laughs, knowing that Eddie could not possibly have tomorrow's newspaper. Richard replies, "same here. Everything's going good. And, now that she's home full time, Sandy has been taking care of the investments and our finances." Eddie, Athena, and Richard catch up for a while, none of them too much in a rush to get to work.

Before he heads out, Richard informs Eddie, "by the way, one of the officers spotted a guy matching the description of this Andrew Goldstein character. He jumped bail five or six years ago. If you happen to see him around, let us know." Eddie replies, "will do." Recalling hearing the name before, Athena inquires, "I remember George mentioning someone named Goldstein. Wasn't he one of the trouble makers from the high school?" Richard replies, "yes, from years ago. This Goldstein character makes these McCutchen characters look like a bunch of small time parking violators."

Eddie mentions, “yeah, seriously. Andy Goldshit is bad news. We’ll just get Braden to rough him up.” Richard laughs, saying, “those were the good old days, when you guys took care of the department’s business the way we would like to.” Athena laughs, recalling how Eddie and Mark once threw Mayor Jamieson and Frank Glooma into the red zone like hammers.

Hearing the name ‘McCutchen’ again, Athena asks Richard, “how about Todd and Jeff McCutchen? Whatever happened to them?” Richard explains, “those two characters are back on the streets again. With their rap sheets, it’s hard for either of them to get a job. This Todd McCutchen character has been seen quite often down at the beach running in the sand with a few people. With his history of auto theft, the officer patrolling that area has his eyes on him. If either of them has a job, it’s working for someone just as shady as they are.”

Eddie asks, “where does McCutchen live these days?” Richard replies, “both of these McCutchen characters are rooming with a few other shady characters on Mason Street, over in Centerville. Mason Street is Centerville’s equivalent of Second Street when Maurice Crum lived there.”

Athena asks, “how about the father? Whatever became of him?” Richard replies, “he got out of the slammer early about a month ago for good behavior. The word is, out on the street, that he’s looking for work, and can’t find any. Not even the grocery store where this character used to work would rehire him.” Athena optimistically comments, “I sure hope he keeps up his good behavior and does something legitimate this time.”

Athena and Richard both head out, and were glad to see each other again. Eddie begins his day, wishing he were at the high school helping with the irrigation system for the new track. But, unfortunately, there is a lot of unfinished work, and the customers want their cars repaired sooner rather than later. If all goes well and Eddie gets his work done early, he might just make it to the high school to help with the project.

Right before lunch, a pickup truck drives into the service station. Behind the wheel is a guy named Steven Wagner, whom Eddie once caught deflating the tires of Ralph Myles’ Volkswagen Beetle when they were in high school. During that encounter, Eddie forced Wagner to pump up Ralph’s automobile tire with a bicycle pump. Wagner’s arms were so sore after that exercise that, for several days, he could not fully extend his forearms. That stunt earned Wagner the nickname of “T-Rex” for a few weeks.

Wagner walks into the service area and asks Eddie, “hey. How are you doing?” Eddie replies, “great. But I don’t feel like working today. I’d rather be with my buddies down at the high school track.” Wagner replies, “I don’t know about that. It’s going to be a hot one out there

today.” Eddie tells Wagner, “it’s really not any cooler in here. All the fans do is blow around the hot air.”

Wagner tells Eddie, “I got the wheels repaired. Do you want to take a look at them?” Eddie replies, “sure,” and walks outside to check out Wagner’s work. Examining the expensive aluminum wheels, Eddie tells Wagner, “these look really good. I can barely tell where the dings were.” Wagner asks Eddie, “what happened to them, anyway?” Eddie replies, “someone crossed the center line, and caused the owner to jump the curb to avoid hitting him. So, two of the rims got a little scraped up.”

Explaining how he repaired the rims, Wagner tells Eddie, “I MIG¹ welded an aluminum bead along the damaged area, and refinished the surface.” Eddie tells Wagner, “they look good. And, so do the new tires.” Wagner informs Eddie, “they’re all balanced, and ready to go.”

Eddie and Wagner unload the four wheels and go into the office where Eddie pays Wagner for repairing the wheels and installing four new tires. Wagner tells Eddie, “your wall of pictures is getting bigger and bigger.” Eddie replies, “yeah, I know. I need to start another wall.” Making Wagner a generous offer, Eddie asks, “do you want to be on the wall? It’d be free advertising.” Wagner replies, “sure. Thanks!” Rolling one of the wheels over to Wagner, Eddie tells him, “hold the wheel in front of you, and I’ll get a photo.” Wagner poses, holding the wheel, and Eddie gets a photograph.

Eddie tells Wagner, “I’ll put your picture up on the left side, with the other auto professionals.” Wagner takes a closer look at the wall of photos. On the left side of the wall, Eddie has photographs of other automotive professionals. On the wall are pictures of Kurt Richter, Vinnie, Jake from across town, Rocky from the Jeep yard, John Malea who gave Kathy her Porsche 914 many years ago, and a few others. Wagner tells Eddie, “thanks! I really appreciate that.”

Wagner, who was once a pain in the ass in high school, now runs a tire shop. Today, Eddie and Wagner now get along well. And surprisingly, if anyone can believe it, Ralph Myles is now Wagner’s accountant.

The next weekend, early Saturday morning in preparation for the party, Kathy walks around the pool area cleaning out the skimmers. Finding a live frog in the skimmer, Kathy yells out to Eddie, “I found a froggie!” Eddie yells back, “I’ll get you the bucket.” Eddie brings Kathy a five-gallon bucket, where Kathy puts the frog. Kathy asks the little critter,

¹ MIG Welding: Metal Inert Gas Welding. A welding method suitable for welding aluminum.

“okay, do you have any friends around here?” The frog looks up at Kathy, likely wondering if Kathy is going to eat him. Eddie asks Kathy, “are you expecting an answer?” Kathy laughs, and replies, “no. But, I’m taking junior, here, to the duck pond. I’ll be right back.” Kathy gets in her Dune Buggy and drives the frog to his new home. While Kathy is away, Eddie checks the pool chemistry, making sure everything is perfect for today’s party.

When Kathy returns, Eddie has the pool area all ready for the party. Seeing the table where she spent a lot of time doing her homework while in college, Kathy takes a seat, and reminisces, “I remember sitting at this table with Paula when I was at the University. We would be out here for three hours, and get maybe an hour of work done.” Eddie replies, “that was almost ten years ago.” Kathy replies, “yeah. And, this is still one of my favorite places in our whole yard.”

By late morning, nearly everyone has arrived. No one in this group wants to miss the pizza, which is still everyone’s favorite dish. Waiting for the pizza to be delivered, everyone relaxes by the pool, except for, perhaps, Tessa. Tessa, maintaining her competitive edge, is swimming a few laps, just in case Eddie has been doing the same.

Sitting on the stone wall talking, Bobby B. asks Matt Wood, “so, how do you like the NFL?” Wood replies, “you know, it’s a job. My job is to sack the quarterback. I like my job, especially when the other team puts a rookie quarterback in. Then, I show them what football is like in the NFL.” Bobby B. laughs, and replies, “really?” Wood replies, “yeah. One rookie thought he was hot shit because his college team won some national championship. I think we sacked him a dozen times during that game.” Bobby B. laughs, telling Wood, “I guess he learned his lesson!”

Shifting to Bobby B’s. accomplishments, Wood mentions, “I heard you broke the world record in the shot-put. That must have felt good.” Bobby B. replies, “yeah. But, I don’t hold the record anymore. Two guys beat me since. But, I’m still working out, and I can bench press more than I could back then. I want my record back. And, I’m going to get it.” Wood asks, “how much can you bench these days?” Bobby B. confidently boasts, “more than you.” Quick to reply, Wood contends, “no, you can’t.” Bobby B. smiles, and confidently replies, “oh yes, I can.”

Sitting at a table, overhearing the conversation, Erika tells Bobby B. and Wood, “there’s a gym downstairs. Talk is never going to settle this, and you guys know it.” Bobby B. looks at Wood, who both smile and stand up and head to Eddie and Kathy’s home gym. Erika yells out, “bench press competition in the gym! Bradshaw versus Wood! Don’t miss it!” A few of the guys head inside with Bobby B. and Wood, wondering who is

going to win. Erika, however, suspects she knows exactly who is going to win.

As the two contenders warm up, Johnson whispers to Eddie, “do you think Wood will beat him?” Eddie replies, “no. Bobby B. arrives at work two hours early a few times a week, and works out in my gym behind the service station.” Mark comments, “I’ve seen him there a lot when I come there to work out.” Mark, who has a small home gym, also often works out in the much larger and better equipped gym behind Eddie’s Service Station. With 4,000 square feet, Eddie’s well-equipped private gym still gets a lot of use.

Ready to begin the competition, Wood asks Bobby B., “how much are we starting with?” Bobby B. replies, “how about six-hundred pounds.” Wood replies, “be real!” Bobby B. backs down, and suggests, “how about 315 pounds, then?” Wood replies, “sure. I’ll go first, and show you how it’s done.” Bobby B. smiles and replies, “be my guest.”

Wood gets onto the bench, knowing that this lift will be easy. Lowering the bar to his chest, Wood lifts the 315-pound bar quite effortlessly, as most any NFL defensive lineman should be able to do. But, after all, Wood is an NFL defensive lineman. Next up, Bobby B. gets onto the bench, lowers the bar to his chest and, just as easily as Wood, raises the bar, completing the lift.

Braden comments, “that’s looking way too easy. When are you guys gonna put some weight on that bar? My grandmother can bench press that!” Braden’s comment fires up Bobby B., but throws Wood a bit off base. Wood insists, “let’s put 405 on the bar, and get this over with.” Bobby B. replies, “what are you talking about? We’re still warming up!” Eddie and Mark, who both know Bobby B. can easily complete the upcoming lift, load the bar with 405 pounds.

Wood gets onto the bench, thinking that the competition will not last too much longer. Lowering the bar to his chest and, after a slight pause, Wood raises the bar and completes the lift. Bobby B. tells Wood, “it looks like you were struggling.” Wood replies, “nah. I dozed off and took a nap halfway through the lift.” Bobby B. confidently gets onto the bench, lowers the bar to his chest and raises the bar, completing the lift. Seeing that Bobby B. was just as easily able to complete his lift, Wood gets slightly concerned.

Braden, who was warming up on the incline bench, sneaks into rotation and gets onto the bench. Dropping the bar to his chest, Braden, who is all fired up, lowers the bar and lifts it just as easily as Bobby B. Braden stands up, and exclaims, “when’s this contest gonna get started? Hunter can even lift that weight!”

Eddie asks Bobby B. and Wood, “how much do you guys want?” Bobby B. suggests, “how about 495 pounds?” Looking worried, Wood replies, “sure. Let’s go for it.” As the bar is loaded with 90 more pounds, Wood paces back and forth, getting himself psyched up.

Wood gets onto the bench, grabs the bar, and lowers it to his chest. Using every last ounce of energy he can find, Wood raises the bar, straining as he makes the lift. Completing the lift, Wood gets off the bench, hammers his chest, and exclaims, “it looks like I won! It’s all me!” Bobby B. tells Wood, “I think I’ll pass on this round.” Eddie laughs and whispers to Mark, “here it comes. He’s going for broke.” Eddie asks, “how much, bro?” Bobby B. quickly answers, “give me 600 pounds. And, I’ll go first. Wood looks like he needs a rest.” Wood looks at Bobby B. like he’s crazy. Nevertheless, 600 pounds is loaded onto the bar.

Bobby B. now paces back and forth, getting himself psyched up. Energetically getting onto the bench, Bobby B. points at Wood, and chants, “you gotta pump the muscle, pumping up the iron! Pump up the muscle, pumping up the iron!” Bobby B. gets into position, ready to show Wood how it’s done. Eddie and Mark are the spotters, as Bobby B. lowers the bar to his chest. Letting out a primal scream as he raises the bar, Bobby B. seriously does not want to lose this competition. Bobby B. successfully completes the lift, sits up, and exclaims, “yes!” Everyone in the gym cheers, including Wood, who cannot believe what he just saw.

Wood gets on the bench, wondering how and when Bobby B. got so strong. Wood has a bit of a struggle raising the bar off the uprights. As Wood lowers the bar to his chest, the bar drops a little faster than he expected. Putting forth his best effort, Wood gives it all that he has. Lifting the bar an inch or so, Wood, even with a primal scream, does not have the strength to complete the lift. Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Bobby B. help Wood raise the bar. Wood concedes, shaking Bobby B.’s hand, telling him, “that was good. Really good. Congratulations!” Bobby B. takes a bow, and replies, “thank you. Thank you.”

On the way upstairs, Wood asks Bobby B., “have you ever thought about playing football?” Bobby B. replies, “we talked about it a few times when I threw for the University. But, I’m not playing football.” Mark comments, “yeah. We talked about that a lot, mostly just for fun.” Walking into the kitchen, they get word that the pizza is being delivered. Making the announcement is Eddie, Jr., who is running around telling everyone the pizza has arrived.

Now that the pizza is all laying out on the counter, everyone digs in. Over lunch, Braden asks Eddie, “is that new grassy area over there for throwing the shot-put?” Eddie replies, “no. It’s a Bocce Ball court.” Braden asks, “what’s Bocce Ball?” Eddie replies, “it’s a game you play with

two teams. It's hard to explain, but easy to play. We'll play later." Braden also mentions to Eddie, "and, you took down your Jasmine wall." Eddie replies, "yeah. I did that two weeks ago. The Jasmine was growing wild. So, we put azaleas along the pool fence instead."

Braden tells Eddie, "I know it took years, but I finally got my yard done the way I want it. Wendy really likes plants. So, I made her engraved mirrored plant identification markers for all her plants. They really look cool." Eddie asks, "you made engraved mirrors for plant identification markers? I've never heard of that before." Braden replies, "I wanted to get something unique for her." Eddie asks, "how many markers do you have?" Braden replies, "about 35 in the front yard and 25 in the back yard." Eddie tells Braden, "your yard is looking really good, bro. You put a lot of work into it. It really shows." Braden replies, "thank you."

Braden asks Eddie, "do you got any ideas how I can get rid of the Chuckie? He's becoming a real pain in the ass." Braden's son, Hunter, asks, "do you mean the boogie man?" Braden tells his son, "yeah. We're talking about the boogie man." Hunter takes his slice of pizza, and tells his father, "I'm going to go eat with mommy. I don't want no boogie man talk." Braden tells his son, "don't drop your pizza." Hunter walks over to the table where Wendy is seated, and joins his mother. Mark walks over and takes the seat vacated by Hunter.

Braden tells Eddie, "back to what I was saying. Do you got any ideas how I can get rid of the Chuckie? Someone shot at my garage window with a BB gun. I gotta get his ass out of there." Eddie jokingly suggests, "you can always burn his house down." Braden replies, "I can't do that! I'll go to jail." Mark suggests, "why don't you mess with him. Call the power company, and have his electricity disconnected." Braden laughs, and replies, "that's a good idea. I might just do that." Mark also suggests, "cut his phone wire. Just mess with him until he sells his house." Eddie reassures Braden, "we'll figure it out, bro. We'll get rid of him somehow." Braden comments, "I just wish the county officers would bust his ass for something."

Over at another table, Hunter sits on Wendy's lap as he eats his slice of pizza. Wendy tells Hunter, "slow down! You're eating way too fast." Hunter boldly informs his mother, "I wanna go in the pool." Hearing Hunter's idea, Eddie, Jr., Mark, Jr., and Dawn all start eating faster. Kathy informs the kids, "you guys can't go in the pool until we check the whole pool and the skimmers for frogs." Eddie, Jr., tells Hunter, "yeah. We can't go in the water until we check for frogs." Hunter asks, "no boogie man?" Eddie, Jr. replies, "no boogie men live here. The boogie man lives on your street." That was the last thing Hunter wanted to hear. But, the legend of Chuckie lives on. To the next generation, Chuckie is known as the boogie

man. All the kids now know that Chuckie is the boogie man, and know exactly where he lives.

After lunch, Kathy and Eddie, Jr. check the skimmers and pool for any signs of frogs, both dead or alive. Kathy checked the pool earlier but, with children, you can't be too careful with things like frogs in the pool or the boogie man hiding out in a skimmer. Seeing no sign of a frog anywhere, Eddie, Jr. yells out, "no frogs," and jumps into the pool.

Lynn Berson asks Kathy, "don't you have to wait 30 minutes after eating before you go in a pool?" Kathy replies, "no. That's an old wives' tale. Someone probably made that up to make their kids wait so they can clean up after lunch or dinner and drink their coffee." Eddie, Jr. is followed by Mark, Jr., Dawn, and Hunter, who sit on the sun shelf and play for now.

Erika walks by the table where Braden is seated, telling Braden, "you know, my dad still wants you on the county police force." Braden replies, "yeah, I know. But, I ain't going nowhere. I'm gonna stay right there at the University, where I can use the gym and watch all the track meets." Erika informs Braden, "my dad put in a gym at the new precinct. You can use that one whenever you want." Braden replies, "I'm really enjoying my job over there at the University. I'm not going anywhere." Erika has been trying to get Braden on the county police force for years. Confident that Braden will join the county police force someday, Erika tells Braden, "when you change your mind, let me know." Braden, however, is perfectly happy working at the University, and will not likely be telling Erika that he will be making a move anytime soon.

Louis Zaino, who is the architect of the new track at the high school, takes a seat next to Angela Meadows, and asks, "how is my video coming along?" Angela replies, "it's going to be good. I really think it will be a great marketing piece for your future work." With a lot riding on the video, Zaino replies, "that's what I was hoping for. I can't wait to see it." Angela is producing a time-lapse video of the new track as it is being installed at the high school. Zaino is hoping that, for future clients, the video will save him a lot of explaining of how a running track is installed. Mark, sitting at another table, turns around, and comments, "and, knowing that they're on camera, the workers work harder. No one is slacking off." The camera, mounted on top of the storage building, has been documenting the progress since the work began.

After lunch, the adults join the kids in the pool. Over at the deep end, Bobby B. and Matt Wood are having their own private cannonball contest. With no judges to gauge their splash, they decide between themselves who is winning. At the shallow end, Eddie, Jr. is showing off his flip turn to Tessa. Eddie, Jr.'s flip turn is a little rough but, after all, he is not quite

four years old. Over at the Bocce Ball court, it's Eddie and Mark versus Braden and Johnson. Braden has discovered that he likes playing Bocce Ball, and is now considering installing a court in his back yard.

Over at the tables, Kathy asks Barbara, "how come you didn't bring George?" Barbara replies, "he's only six months old. He'd bake out here in the hot sun." Paula suggests, "you could just squirt him with the hose, and cool him off." Barbara replies, "I'm not going to do that! What's gotten into you, girl?" Kathy replies, "she has heat stroke again. Or, maybe she's pregnant." Paula tells Kathy, "I don't have heat stroke, and I'm not pregnant either!" Kathy smiles and replies, "who knows? It could be both." Not giving Paula a chance to reply, Kathy jumps into the water. Paula and Barbara follow, both suddenly wondering why they are sitting in the heat rather than cooling off in the pool.

Finished with their Bocce Ball game, Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Johnson all jump into the water. With nearly everyone now in the pool, Eddie's brother, John, stands at the pool's edge, and yells out, "I have an announcement to make!" Paula whispers to Kathy and Barbara, "I wonder if Anne is pregnant." Kathy replies, "I hadn't heard anything about that." Making his announcement, John yells out, "we're laying the sod for the new track on Saturday, July 20. I'm going to need a whole lot of help. Anyone who wants to help, come on by. They'll be pizza for lunch, and I'm buying. So, mark it on your calender."

Kathy whispers to Paula, "I should have known. He's always trying to find someone to do his work for him." Paula asks Kathy, "are you going to help?" Kathy replies, "sure. Why not? After all, you guys, Bobby B., and us are paying the bill." Barbara comments, "at the very least, we'll get a workout and pizza out of it." Kathy laughs, and replies, "yeah. If John is paying for the pizza, we can sit there all afternoon and eat pizza." Paula tells Kathy, "he's still getting off really cheap." Kathy points out, "we're the ones getting off cheap, girl. We're not paying for the labor." Paula exclaims, "that's right! I'm definitely going to be there."

Early evening, the party winds down, and many of the guests head out. Now, the second party begins. Hanging around for the second party is Eddie, Kathy, Mark, Paula, Braden, Wendy, Mitchell, Amber, Bobby B., Erika, Johnson, and Barbara. The six guys are the original tribe, as named by Anthony Ambrosini when they were freshmen in high school. Eddie, Jr., Mark, Jr., Dawn, and Hunter, all worn out from the busy day of fun, all fall asleep inside on the floor.

Now that the original tribe and their wives are alone, Eddie brings out two rocks that look like geodes, which he and Kathy found at the rocky outcropping where the blue, yellow, and red stones were originally found. Kathy is hoping that there are more blue, yellow, and red stones inside.

This way, each member of the tribe will have their own collection of stones.

A few years ago, Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula went back to the time when they were in high school. The group told their younger counterparts to explain to the other members of the tribe about the portal, that is, only if they believed that time travel was possible. Unfortunately, Eddie's brother John, Hoffer, and a few others did not believe. By telling Braden, Wendy, Bobby B., Erika, Johnson, Barbara, Mitchell, and Amber about the portal, the future was radically changed. With the original tribe all now knowing about the portal, the group is closer than ever.

Upon learning about the portal, over the years, Braden has mostly used the portal to go forward in time to buy radio equipment and weapons that are not available at his time. Mitchell and Amber have used the portal to find interesting places to train. Johnson has occasionally done the unthinkable and gone into the future to discover the outcome of a few track meets. Johnson used this information to make adjustments to events, thereby winning the meet. Bobby B. and Amber have taken many trips with Paula to the bank, which is Paula's term for buying gold in the present and selling it in the future for a profit.

As he passes the rocks around, Eddie asks, "does anyone have any ideas of how to open the rocks?" Erika jokingly suggests, "Bobby can throw it like a shot-put. If it lands on the concrete, it might break open." Bobby B. replies, "it might break the concrete instead." Mark suggests, "we could use an angle grinder with a masonry cutting wheel." Eddie replies, "that should work." Bobby B. also replies, "yeah. That sounds like it would work to me." Mark tells Eddie, "I have one in my truck, but it's at home." Eddie replies, "I have one, bro. I use it for cutting metal. And, I have a masonry cutting wheel."

Johnson shakes one of the rocks, which seems to be filled with many smaller rocks. Johnson mentions, "there seems to be a lot more rocks inside of it." Kathy explains, "we were hoping that there are blue, yellow, and red stones inside." Barbara asks Kathy, "so, you found these two rocks over at the rocky outcropping?" Kathy explains, "yeah. We dug that place up from one end to another. I think we found every last stone."

Mark also mentions, "and, we dug up the area by the original portal on the path to the beach. All we found there was one blue stone, and one red stone." Barbara suggests, "that would lead me to believe someone else knew about the portal at one time." Kathy exclaims, "that's right! I hope we didn't break someone's portal!" Paula points out, "both stones were scattered all over the place, and were nowhere near where we found the yellow stone a long time ago. It was probably a very long time ago."

Erika asks, “why are we talking? Let’s cut those babies open!” Mark stands up, announcing, “I’m ready.”

Over at Eddie’s detached garage, he gets his angle grinder, and attaches a masonry cutting wheel. Eddie asks, “who want’s to do the honors?” Mark volunteers, saying, “I will.” Outside, Mark gets to work, carefully cutting the rock open. Everyone stands back, staying out of the path of the rock dust. Wendy asks, “how does that cut right through rock that easily?” Eddie replies, “the cutting wheel is turning at 12,000 RPM. And, it’s harder than the stone.” Overhearing Eddie’s comment, Mark informs Eddie, “just barely! I’m going to need another cutting wheel. This rock is as hard as stone!” Erika comments, “that’s because it is a stone.” Everyone laughs, knowing that Erika’s comment is quite accurate. Wendy comments, “Mark walked right into that one.”

After a monumental effort, Mark finishes cutting the round rock in half, and brings it over to the group. Still holding the rock together, Mark hands the rock to Paula. Mark then steps aside to hose the dust off himself. At the stone knee wall next to Eddie’s garage, Paula carefully separates the two halves of the rock, and out pours a generous quantity of blue, yellow, and red stones. Everyone cheers, knowing that each of them can now have their very own stones. While everyone looks at the stones, Paula examines the inside of the rock, which seems to resemble a geode, but is rounded inside. Paula quickly concludes the geode, itself, is made of a really hard material since Mark had a very hard time opening it.

After seeing what is inside the first rock, Paula yells out to Mark, “hey, Mark! Open up the second rock.” Mark takes the angle grinder to the second rock, as everyone else looks over the beautiful stones. Eddie walks over to Mark, announcing, “the second shift is here. Do you want me to take over?” Mark replies, “I’m sorry about your cutting wheel, bro. This stuff is as hard as stone. The cutting wheel got all eaten up. But, yeah. You can give it a try.” Eddie looks at the cutting wheel, and tells Mark, “let me get another cutting wheel.” Eddie changes the cutting wheel on the angle grinder, and gets to work, finding that the stone is much harder than he originally thought.

Eddie finishes the work, and hands the cut stone to Mark. Mark brings the stone over to the wall, where he slowly separates the two halves. Inside, there is another generous supply of blue, yellow, and red stones. Wendy energetically exclaims, “there’s enough stones for everyone!” Seeing what was inside the stone, Mark replies, “yeah, I’d say.”

Paula tells Mark, “look at what we found.” Mark exclaims, “wow! A clear stone! I wonder what it does.” Erika suggests, “maybe it takes you to a clear universe.” Paula comments, “I’m sure we’ll find out soon enough.” Eddie hoses the rock dust off of himself, and tells everyone, “I’m

jumping in the pool for a minute to get the rest of this dust off of me.” Mark replies, “I’m joining you.”

While Eddie and Mark are in the pool cleaning off, the rest of the group brings the stones inside. With all the stones laid out on the table, Kathy mentions, “it’s kind of odd that there are the same number of stones of each color in each geode. And, they’re all perfectly cut!” Paula comments, “what’s really odd is there are 12 stones of each color in each geode, and there are twelve of us.” Mitchell tells the group, “this is really weird. Two identical geodes with the identical contents can’t possibly happen in nature. It totally defies probability.”

Bobby B. asks, “I wonder how perfectly cut stones got inside of a rock that’s harder than steel.” Erika replies, “aliens put them inside.” Paula exclaims, “there are no such things as aliens!” Kathy informs Paula, “if there’s a boogie man, then there are aliens.” Paula, who was very afraid of the boogie man when she was a child, exclaims, “stop it, girl! There is no boogie man!” Kathy, knowing exactly how Paula would respond, just smiles.

Quickly changing the subject, Paula asks Kathy, “how many stones have we found before today?” Kathy replies, “in total, we’ve found twelve yellow stones, ten blue ones, and eleven red ones.” Paula surmises, “I’m guessing there was another one of these geode kind of things that had our other stones in them. It must have broken open.” Mitchell theorizes, “if each geode had twelve stones of each color, there are two blue stones and one red stone still out there somewhere.” Kathy curiously mentions, “I still want to know how exactly three stones, one of each color, made its way to the three boulders on the way to the beach.” Paula suggests, “someone else knew about the portal.”

Contemplating all of what Paula mentioned, Erika suggests, “the third geode must have broken open when it fell out of the spaceship that dumped them here.” Paula tells Erika, “stop it, girl! There is no spaceship, and there are no aliens!” Erika asks Paula, “what’s more believable? A spaceship or parallel universes?” Kathy can’t help to comment, “the spaceship must have dumped the boogie man here too.” Paula quickly replies, “not!” Kathy reminds Paula again, “millions of kids have seen the boogie man. All those kids can’t possibly be wrong.” Knowing that she’ll lose the boogie man argument like she did a thousand times in the past, Paula does not dare to respond.

Kathy mentions to the group, “there’s still that one-pound blue stone that I found. We’ve never found a matching red or yellow stone that was that big. And, the big blue stone doesn’t make the portal work.” Erika postulates, “that’s because the big blue stone powered the space ship that brought the other stones here.” Paula again tells Erika, “stop it, girl!

There is no spaceship!” Kathy tells Erika, “Paula’s probably right. It wasn’t a space ship. The boogie man dropped all the stones here.” Erika calmly replies, “that makes a lot of sense. It had to have been the boogie man.” Paula ignores Kathy and Erika, not wanting to get into a discussion about the boogie man.

Paula is saved by the bell. All cleaned up, Eddie and Mark walk up, and Eddie asks, “what do we got?” Kathy replies, “blue, yellow, red, and clear stones, twenty-four of each.” Eddie and Mark take a look, paying particular attention to the clear stones that they’ve not seen before. The group divides the stones among themselves, each now having a total of two or three stones of each color.

Eddie looks at the rock shell, stating, “this isn’t very pretty inside.” Not letting the subject go, Kathy replies, “that’s because the boogie man lived inside the rock. Now there are three boogie men unleashed in the world.” Paula tells Kathy, “stop it, girl! There is no such thing as the boogie man! And, you know it!” Kathy reminds Paula, “that’s not what you said when you were in grade school.” Braden tells Paula, “don’t get into that argument with Hunter. He ain’t gonna let you win that one. He’s seen the boogie man.” Wendy comments, “yeah. And his name is Chuckie.”

Braden then asks, “that reminds me. Does anybody got any good ideas how to get rid of the Chuckie?” Eddie replies, “I told you, bro. Burn his house down.” Braden laughs, and replies, “you know I can’t do that. Anybody else got any ideas?” Kathy laughs, and suggests to Braden, “you can get rid of him the same way I got rid of Paul Mahoney.” Braden asks, “how did you guys do that, again?” Kathy explains, “one day, after school, me and Eddie went back in time to the morning. We met our counterparts at my house before school. Then, two of me and two of Eddie went to Paul Mahoney’s house. When he came out of his house to get in his car, me and my counterpart approached him from both sides, yelling out to him, ‘we are Katarina Karakova.’ Mahoney went into a major league panic, and ran back inside. He ended in a sanitarium after that.”

Wanting to get rid of Chuckie in any way possible, Wendy exclaims, “that sounds perfect! Let’s set a date!” Liking the idea, Mark suggests, “how about Saturday, July 20? We’ll all be at the new track, laying sod.” Paula exclaims, “that would be the perfect alibi!” Braden asks, “what do we do? How do we do this?” Kathy explains, “we go into the future to the date Saturday, July 20. Then, we meet ourselves and go pay the little Chuckie a visit.” Paula points out, “but, we’ll all be at the track.” Kathy replies, “so, then we just travel to Saturday, July 20 on multiple days, and there can be two, three, or four of us.”

Kathy thinks for a moment, and mentions, “we’ll have to go to the past, and tell our counterparts to do this.” Paula asks, “why?” Kathy explains, “because, if we go to the future to Saturday, July 20, like right now, we couldn’t do it a second time without coming back. Traveling to the past isn’t subject to those rules.” Paula agrees, saying, “that makes a lot of sense.” Braden, who is not quite as familiar with the use of the portal, replies, “I’m glad it makes sense to you guys. It don’t make no sense to me.” Kathy assures Braden, “don’t worry. We’ll take care of it.”

Paula asks Kathy, “so, what’s the plan?” Kathy explains, “we’ll just go to the past, and tell our counterparts to go to the future on three separate occasions, all to the date Saturday, July 20, at exactly 11:00 in the morning. And, we’ll meet in Braden’s front yard, behind that big bush. Then, we’ll walk across the street to the Chuckie’s house, and knock on his door. And, they’ll be three of each of us in the Chuckie’s front yard. Then, we can mess with his head. That should scare the shit out of him. And, if he calls the police, on July 20 we will all be at the high school laying sod.” Paula tells Kathy, “you, me, Mark, and Eddie can do that.” Braden asks, “do you think that will get rid of him?” Eddie replies, “it’s worth a shot.” Everyone agrees that it is a great plan, so the date for the great takedown of Chuckie is set for 11:00 a.m. on July 20.

The evening winds down, with everyone now having two perfectly cut stones of each color. Mark and Paula carry Mark, Jr. and Dawn, who are still asleep, out to the car. As Braden carries Hunter out to the car, Hunter wakes up, and asks, “can I go in the pool?” Braden tells Hunter, “you can go in the pool tomorrow. It’s past your bedtime.” Hunter replies, “so?” Braden tells Hunter, “it’s past my bedtime, and mommy’s bedtime, too. So, there ain’t nobody to watch you in the pool.” Hunter falls back asleep, and will definitely not forget that his father told him that he can go in the pool tomorrow.

When Braden gets home, he decides to check his pool chemistry and clean the skimmers before he goes to bed, thus having one less chore to do tomorrow morning. Going out into his back yard, Braden sees that someone is in his pool. Braden yells out, “hey! Get your two asses out of my pool!” One of the uninvited swimmers whispers to the other, “shit! We’re in trouble now.” Braden yells back to them, “that’s right! Both of your asses are in trouble now. Now, get your asses out of my pool!” Both trespassers move slowly toward the ladder, knowing that what is coming will not be fun.

Seeing Chuckie struggling to get out of the pool, Braden grabs Chuckie’s arm, giving it a strong pull. Chuckie screams out, “ow! You’re hurting me!” Braden exclaims, “I ain’t even begun to hurt you, junior! Your ass ain’t seen nothing yet!” Braden tells Haynes, “I’ll be back for your ass in a minute.” Braden drags Chuckie to the gate, and out to the

road. Chuckie screams out, “let me go!” Braden boldly tells Chuckie, “shut your ass, junior! You’re gonna wake everyone up!” Giving Chuckie a simultaneous kick behind his knee and a brisk shove to his back, Braden thrusts Chuckie onto the road. Chuckie lands on his face and cries out in pain. Braden goes back for Terry Haynes, finding that she is already coming out of the gate, and running away. Braden lets her go, not wanting to be bothered with chasing her down.

Braden locks the gate, and goes inside. Chuckie and Haynes run across the street to Chuckie’s house, knowing better than to call the police. Should Chuckie call the police, the officer taking the call will not likely believe any part of Chuckie’s story. And besides, with all the illegal drugs likely to be found in Chuckie’s house, he does not want to risk getting arrested.

Over the past few years, Eddie has been busy expanding his real estate holdings. Next to Eddie’s Service Station sits an old house that was formerly used as a photography studio. The photography business has closed, and the owner, Emily, has retired and moved away. The building immediately came up for either sale or lease, catching Eddie’s attention. Eddie, recalling from a trip to the past through the portal, remembers that, at sometime in the future, the location of the photography studio will be the future location of Eddie’s Tire and Power Cell. Sitting on three acres with 400 feet of road frontage, the property is a prime piece of real estate.

Moving on the deal the first day the property is on the market, Eddie contacts Davies and Rice, L.L.P., informing them that he wants to buy the building. Mr. Rice draws up the contract, and presents it to the seller on Eddie’s behalf. The seller accepts Eddie’s offer, and the property is transferred to Eddie. The seller, who is getting up there in years, had retired years ago, and was glad to unload the property.

Not yet knowing the specifications for building a tire and power cell facility, Eddie decides to not move ahead with any building construction at the current time. Not immediately knowing what to do with the property, Eddie hires Mark to completely renovate the old, but very well built, home. After all, Eddie, Jr. has at least fifteen years before he enters the working world. Eddie figures he’ll put the building up for lease until it’s time to move forward with the power cell and tire facility. Eddie’s goal is merely to get the place leased out to pay for the expenses over the next few years.

Mark arrives at the project, asking Eddie, “what are we doing with this place?” Remembering the large parking lot at Eddie’s Tire and Power Cell, Eddie replies, “the first thing I want to do is put in a parking lot.” Mark asks, “where?” Eddie replies, “on the right side of the property. Make the

parking lot eight inches of steel reinforced concrete, and use lots of rebar. And, put in lighting like we did at Dr. Akinmola's church." Mark asks, "how many parking spaces?" Eddie replies, "one hundred sounds about right. But, make the parking places twelve feet wide because it will eventually be an auto repair facility, and I don't want any doors to get dinged. And, put in a few parking places for trucks." Mark replies, "got it."

Mark asks, "what else?" Eddie explains, "the brick is in great shape, but the windows are not, so, replace all the windows. The floors need some work, so sand and refinish the hardwoods. And, paint the walls and ceilings. All three restrooms need new fixtures. All the lighting fixtures, inside and out, need to be replaced. And, there's a darkroom in the house. Just leave the darkroom as it is until I get someone in there." Mark asks, "so, you want the place looking brand new?" Eddie thinks for a moment, and replies, "yeah. That's it, bro! Make the place look brand new!" Mark laughs, and asks Eddie, "why didn't you just say so?" Eddie laughs, and replies, "well, I did. I just used a lot more words than you did."

Eddie and Mark take a look around the building, inside and out, making sure they've not forgotten anything. Mark suggests building an eight-foot high wall around the property, similar to the one behind Eddie's Service Station. Eddie agrees, knowing that a wall will provide additional security for Eddie's Tire and Power Cell in the future. Mark makes a few notes, then heads home to line up the contractors to do the work.

A few days before Saturday, July 20, Eddie is at the service station working on customizing a golf cart for the high school. Adding a lift kit, larger knobby tires, a trailer hitch, a wide-view rear view mirror, and two-way radio are among the list of enhancements. Best of all, Eddie upgraded the drive train to a 72-volt motor, increasing both the torque and top speed. Once Eddie is finished with his customization, Vinnie will give the golf cart a new paint job.

The golf cart, however, is not for the golf team. Dr. Zunde would tell the golfers to run between strokes, and carry their own clubs, thus getting some real exercise on the golf course. The electric-powered golf cart will replace the Cushman vehicle that the track team has been using to retrieve the field implements from the red zone. With two golf carts in progress, Eddie has his work cut out for him, planning to have at least one of them completed before the dedication of the new track.

Bobby B. walks over, asking Eddie, "are the golf carts still on schedule?" Eddie replies, "yes. But, it's going to be tight. I'm going to get one over to Vinnie today so he can start the paint job. This way, I'll have at least one ready for the dedication." Bobby B. asks Eddie, "why

does Johnson need two golf carts?” Eddie explains, “one is for retrieving the field implements from the red zone. Johnson is going to use the other one to transport runners from the school to the track during the home meets.” Bobby B. smiles, and asks, “what? Are they too lazy to walk?” Eddie laughs, and replies, “no. During really hot days, he wants to keep the runners inside, in the air conditioning. That will give them a slight competitive edge when their event is called.”

Bobby B. suggests, “the other teams aren’t going to think that’s very fair.” Eddie replies, “the other teams can sit in the school, too, if they wanted to. Or, they can hire an air-conditioned bus to take them to the meets, and hang out in the bus until their event comes up.” Bobby B. asks, “if the runners stay inside the school, is that against the rules?” Eddie replies, “no. Johnson already ran that by Kathy’s father. It turns out that there is no rule either allowing or disallowing it. So, it’s fair game.”

Bobby B. asks, “it looks like it’s almost finished. What’s left to do?” Eddie explains, “since the golf cart has way more power than the factory version, it bucks a little when you first take off. So, I machined an anti-tramp bar to prevent bucking. That should take care of it. I’m about to put those in now. Then, I’m taking it over to Vinnie’s so he can start the paint job.” Bobby B. intelligently asks, “couldn’t you just put in stiffer leaf springs?” Eddie replies, “I already did, because it’s now carrying six twelve-volt batteries. If the springs were any stiffer, the ride would be way too harsh.”

By mid afternoon, Eddie has the first golf cart completed, and gives it a test drive, pushing it to its limit. Having the bucking problem solved, Eddie drives the first unit across the street to Vinnie’s Body Shop, where Vinnie will begin the custom paint job. Eddie then continues the work he started on the second golf cart, hoping to get it finished before the dedication.