



## Profile of Courage

by Perry A. Chapdelaine, Sr.

### *Jeramiah Hill: Last Chapter*

Although all of the previous chapters of *Profiles of Courage* were dedicated to men or women who obviously surmounted great odds, often facing personal pain or death with their decisions, I've included in this last chapter a "maybe." Truthfully I don't know if Jeramiah Hill belongs in this slender volume. I'm convinced, however, that personal courage requires an extremely large confront level, and that the largest of all fears to confront is oneself, one's own ego, our very beingness. For that reason alone I've decided to end this volume with a sketch on what I know of Jeramiah Hill. Maybe he belongs!

That first day at Sandstone Conglomerates was like walking through shadowy time, with brilliant swaths of light and dark, gloom and joy, pain and remembrances shafting hallways at every stride. The effect wasn't created by the chrome-steel railings and black walnut paneling, nor the glassways indirectly lit, nor the smiling, over-polite indistinguishably dressed youngsters who guided me about after glancing at my lapel tag that read "Classified Research"; nor was it from the yellow and baldheaded, indifferent personnel director who shook hands, then nodded me on my way as if I were just another ordinary problem to be solved for the moment; nor was it any of the other hundreds of small things -- odors, textures, or even my thoughts that might have haphazardly associated with my old school days.

It was simply seeing and being with Jeramiah!

Jeramiah Hill: Red of hair, blotched, red-freckled face, strong white teeth, square of jaw, bulky but trim. . . .

Jeramiah Hill, indeed! For it was he who still seemed to skip boyishly toward me, right-hand outward to shake mine, a broad grin, wrinkling eye and dimpling cheeks, a captivating smile with fine, even white teeth. Did I mention that his hair was still parted at the left side, with straight hairs sticking over his right eye from his right side, just as it had been years ago?

"Jeramiah," I said, voice quavering in awed greeting at this fortuitous coincidence.

"John," he returned simple and forthright.

Though the actual year lies vague in my memory -- perhaps '37 or '38 during the tailing end of the Great Depression and a generation away from World War I -- the same year I became delivery boy in North Dakota for the *Grand Forks Herald and Tribune* -- I distinctly remember my first unpleasant encounter with Jeramiah Hill:

I was a new grade-school child to the state, the city, the neighborhood.

Jeramiah was born in the sixth house down, a lonely child and a loner. He was also a bastard, an illegitimate love-child of a spinstress who sewed and fitted ladies garments at one of the larger department stores; and he was fathered by a cabbie, who now and then, like some clandestine, medieval lover, sneaked back to visit either Jeramiah or his mother, whenever his mother's two brothers, both older bachelors, were out of town.

During those testy days lack of money was no social crime, but rather a finely spread disease. And while we were too young to know of sex and its consequences, we'd hear others' whisper and their scathing remarks. Strange that, no matter how poverty-stricken, families then maintained Puritanic fixations and harsh scruples. There were still those who believed in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, for example. I knew their mentality intimately because my folks lived upstairs and rented from the lady who headed the predominately female movement, and it was also there where many monthly meetings were held in strategy sessions to close down man's evil influence, old John Barleycorn.

Jeramiah's uncles did not want his mother to marry a common cabbie, a man below her station, and so the perhaps careless consummation was never dignified. And because she'd conceived out of



wedlock, she was surely not to be accepted among her own.

I was conceived out of wedlock too, but that was deeply hidden because my genetic parents married and mother kept hidden the birth certificate and its terrible date. But mother and I were quite socially acceptable, or so was the nature of the times.

Such logic reminds of antiquated eras, like Charles Dickens'.

Irrational social pockets like ours existed everywhere in the nation then, reinforced by personal insecurities, fear and deep depression attitudes that affected everyone's lives. Jeramiah's mother, for example, lived lonely, lost in pitifully meaningless female work, her sole pleasure that of sacrifice for her son, which Jeramiah, of course, over-abused.

But the two uncles were also hypocritical ruts who pretended to no religion, indeed, they delighted in shocking through their open avowals of atheism. Freethinkers, free-talkers, free-acting, they seemed to be at best latter-day hedonists. And as to puritannical sex? They violated every so-called norm, because it was Jeramiah Hill who first introduced me to condoms, an ever-present but changing supply found not well hidden in both bachelor's bedrooms.

So long as Jeramiah's mother, their sister, stayed at her proper station, she and Jeramiah had absolute security, if not love and loving familial relations, and anyone who had security during that era had everything.

I dwell on Jeramiah's brilliant uncles and victim-willing mother to make the point of understanding better Jeramiah's own brilliant, conflicting qualities.

Both uncles were consulting engineers, frequently gone about the world, never lacking for large quantities of money, which they used liberally on themselves and minimally on Jeramiah and his mother.

Here he was again, after how many years? Twenty? Twenty-five? Twenty-eight?

Clasping my hand tightly with his larger ones, he swung me about, seeming to declare a close, genuine interest in a spontaneous renewal of our friendship, asking, "How have you been? What have you done? How has it been?" and so on.

When I answered and asked likewise, my first most unpleasant confrontation with Jeramiah Hill returned ever so clearly:

That fall day, after school, it was breezy, even chilly through my thin jacket. I was on my way to a new Shirley Temple movie when Jeramiah appeared before me suddenly from behind a thick tree-trunk beside the sidewalk. I had smiled, and said, "Hi!"

The red cowlick over his right eye dominated his features as his red bespectled facial expression became over-serious. Smiling not, he asked gruffly, "Where ya' goin'?"

"The show." I opened my right fist, proudly displaying ten pennies, a large fortune.

Thrusting quickly, he made a bewildering grab at my pennies. I fortunately hung onto my great fortune, but I was pushed down with Jeramiah on top, pummeling, and striving to open my fist so he could get those valuable pennies.

Unhurt, but surprised and fearful, I struggled and wondered why this undeclared fight? To steal my pennies?

I got behind Jeramiah and held back his arms, twisting them. He howled with pain, and I shouted, "Give up?"

He refused, so I twisted harder.

"OK, OK" he gasped, so I let go.

I was quite perplexed at the brazenness of this new kid's motives, but also relieved. I'd won, hadn't I? Saved my pennies, right? I pocketed my precious pennies, and dusted myself off. I turned my back to march toward Shirley Temple when, wham! I was knocked down again, tackled and finally defeated



by the loser.

Later we'd become great friends, and so here he was again, after all these years. Jeramiah! Bigger and stronger than I had grown, as he'd also come to be during our grade-school years together.

"Come in, John." he led me into the south wing, his laboratory, glittering and gleaming from overhead fluorescents reflecting on burnished chrome and glass.

Naturally I asked, conventionally, "What are you doing here, Jeramiah?"

"I'm your group leader. Didn't you know?"

No, I hadn't. Having satisfied professorial duties after my long, struggling Ph.D. candidateship, I was generally unfamiliar with the industrial research world. I wasn't privy to restricted information. In any case I wouldn't have recognized the name Jeramiah Hill as being the same chum of my youth.

When Germany invaded England, and World War II was close, Jeramiah was already the youngest marine instructor of electronics in the then United States. I lost track afterward, assuming that he must have pacified his nature somewhat because the Marine's had somehow survived, although they'd had an especially difficult time in South America.

Here and now, in his gleaming laboratory, in the corner and at the sides, were large, modern computers. Pointing, he most glibly explained: "This project is nominally an extension of von Neuman's effort to identify postulates for a truly creative thinking machine. At least that's what everyone thinks it is," he smirked, permitting the left corner of his lips to rise higher than his right. There again was that stance, that appearance, that devilish, uncaring -- perhaps *risque* would be a better word -- manner. Or perhaps "I'll do what I please!" might have described it better.

While *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding Fact & Fiction* had tippytoed me into the study of mathematics - or at least toward a technically oriented career -- it is also true that one of those pulps was instrumental in causing me to witness Jeramiah's most inner fiber, so to speak.

We were high school freshmen. He was seated two rows to my left in the largest study hall. His fingers were as freckled and blotchy as his face, and they traced their way through freshman math problems easily. But every now and then his uncle's expensive engineering slide-rule popped above his desk top, and then down again, as he used it to estimate an answer, and then filled in blanks.

At the same time I had hidden *Amazing Stories* doubled along its spine, behind a large book. I was absorbed with a new story by Isaac Smith, PhD, titled "The Blue Lensman."

Nobody was permitted to read trash magazines during school time, nor to use slide-rules that inhibit development of proper mental arithmetical processes.

Miss Boombottom -- the only name we ascribed to her -- wandered about, keen of eye and sharp of claw. She was also skinny of frame, had long, protruding teeth that some say glowed in the dark. Her head seemed to have eyes at each of six sides, and her long, slender arm, they said, was grafted to stout hickory.

In swooping seconds she managed to splinter Jeramiah's uncle's expensive slide-rule across the desk's edge, and to tear up my invaluable magazine purchased with twenty-five cents hard depression cash. Since her hands were big, like a wrestler's, she could as easily tear the largest telephone book with nothing but bare hands.

Students were not protected by nation's rights or interpretation of individual rights in those days, and so they assigned student monitors who would attend to our misbehavior. Our school, practicing modern psychology, believed that peer pressure should provide peer group and individual controls.

So we had snitches from the student body at every corner in the hallway telling us how to talk, walk, behave, and so on.

Final punishment also came from student peers, and for those they always pick on the peeriest, older football players that weighed in at four or five times more than us small, skinny, scholarly peers.



There we were, red-haired genius, an on-again, off-again friend, and myself, sitting lonely, together, in a glassed-in spare storage room. There were three rows of empty library shelving and the biology teacher kept a live boa constrictor in one corner, glassed-in of course.

Some one had rounded up a frightened mutt which was temporarily tied at another corner of the room, opposite from the snake. Several rows of empty lockers filled the rest of the space, except for low benches beneath windows that formed a partition between the storage room and the corridor where passed students going from class to class each hour.

I was wondering if Jeramiah would permit the paddling he'd been assigned as punishment by our peers, and what he'd think if I did, and how might we squirm out of it, and so on, when in walked football hero, Jimmy Nordham, big hickory paddle in hand.

Jimmy locked the door, pocketed the key, and, grinned sadistically, ordering "Stoop!" to Jeramiah.

I shuttled backward to be inconspicuous.

Jeramiah's teeth grated. He angrily shouted, "No! Won't! Against the law!"

I recognized his stance, that terrible gleam in Jeramiah's black eyes -- which I always visualized as red, like his hair, freckles and temper -- and I stood aside, letting the stronger will have its way.

Pound for pound Nordham had already paddled Jeramiah.

Brain for brain, Jimmy Nordham might as well have fallen upon the floor, and beat his fists against the small, hard tile inlays, and screamed loudly for mercy.

Jimmy advanced on Jeramiah, paddle held high and ready. But Jeramiah bounded upward, clawing himself to the top of clattering lockers and hopped from one row of library shelves to another as Jimmy sadistically plodded after him.

Hall monitors began pressing their noses against the windowed partition.

I scrunched backward further, getting out of the way of the violent chase.

Jimmy's face reddened and he struck out with heavy ineffective blows before he stopped to study the matter. Then, with one swift football rush, he pushed his shoulder against intermediate lockers to topple them against the library shelves.

Jeramiah headed in a direction opposite from what Jimmy expected, dropping beside the boa constrictor's tank.

Just as Jimmy bounded around the nearest fallen locker-row, his face fiercely contorted, Jeramiah reached inward, grabbed the thick reptile, and flung it over Nordham.

Terrified, Jimmy dropped the paddle, clawing and screaming hoarsely.

Jeramiah also loosed the dog which, confused and fearful of the terrible din and distracted by the noise and motions, struck at its nearest source, Jimmy's leg, sinking its fangs deeply.

As the dog tugged at Jimmy and the snake convulsed, Jimmy bellowed.

Jeramiah coolly retrieved the fallen hickory paddle and heaved it with a frightful surge against the plate glass, shattering it across the hallway, and scattering the other hall monitors who'd been watching through the windows.

Turning to me, he said, "OK, John. Doorway's open. Let's trot."

We were both expelled temporarily, the following investigations and court cases settling precedent, and bringing an end to peer paddlings.

Gosh we admired Jeramiah's guts.

And here I am, wondering about Jeramiah: where he'd been, what he'd done, which of his many asocial personalities I faced: mischievous, dedicated, sober, explorative, brilliant and accommodating, and so on.

"I let others work on it," he was saying, "because I think it's a dead-end, you know. Perhaps Neuman himself will do it, perhaps not. Surely when we can sink a trillion small components into a cubic inch,



when we approximate the order-of-magnitude of the complexity of the ape, or even the dog brain.

"Another thing. We've got to know more about other kinds of neural connections. Everything so far is by analogy to gross electrical characteristics. Bionics, sure. But what of chemicals, and their effects? Both can provide models and keys and insight, not just logic or mathematics alone. . . ."

The Jeramiah of my youth had been quiet most of the time, except on odd occasions, when he seemed to delight in devilry. We broke into his uncles' projects -- they had everything bachelor engineers could desire. Jeramiah was never punished for these breakins, which I couldn't understand.

When we were grade school children, we made "dynamite" out of uncles' gunpowder. Jeramiah'd caught me in a clever trap, and, using pulleys and tackle, swung me over a steel cannister used to store scrap, and then he casually dropped our home-made "dynamite" into the drum.

"Had to prove the explosion would rupture walls, not the top," he later explained glibly, after releasing me. "Shaped charge, you know."

"Yea gods!" I railed. "What's my part supposed to've proved?"

That was another time when he'd rattled on to another subject.

Later, we'd cut up valuable hoses and cannisters to make a diving helmet, before the days of aqualungs. I'll say this for him. Jeramiah didn't hesitate donning it himself with me on top panting and pushing, vainly trying to force air against six feet of water with an ordinary bicycle tire-pump.

So while I was busy developing and maturing by reading *Tarzan and the Scorpion Men* or *Tom Swift and His Electric Dirigible*, or watching the original King Kong climb the world's tallest building in the world in Tokyo, or blithely throwing away my first Superman *Action Comics*, along with secret rings and codes and Number 9 Membership Card of the first Superman Club, Jeramiah was busily mining his uncles' engineering treasures: machinery and laboratory equipment that only two dedicated bachelor engineers would gather.

Even before Germany invaded England Jeramiah'd drawn out complete plans for an anti-aircraft gun that would follow its target.

He passed the first collegiate aptitude test that permitted by-passing high school mathematics and science, sort of a bonus for winning the "peers/paddling" incident.

He invented a TV tube that "probably" would bring pictures into homes, and displayed its use during Engineer's Day at the University of North Dakota. Sure, others knew the principles and developed them elsewhere. But remember -- Jeramiah and I were just high school kids.

He stole my first girl; gave a lecture before confused college professors on Einstein's theories as they'd been laid out before the great man's death in a concentration camp for Jews; learned to play classical music on his mother's piano and his uncle's oboe; learned to mix exotic herbs and spices with ordinary food to become chef-extraordinary; helped me sneak into a local grocery store in the midst of night so's we could eat all the ice cream and bananas we wanted; and had a shouting visit from both the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), because so many dogs in the neighborhood were staggering drunk.

Here he was: wild, malicious, mischievous, brilliant, serious -- pointing to a table of wrinkled spaghetti that eyes would never untangle unaided.

Hovering over the spaghetti was a violet glow that formed cones and pyramids and intersecting parabolas. "That," he said pridefully, "the persecuted Einstein conceived, and I've developed."

I stared into the flickering melange and could only ask, "What?" remaining as perplexed as the day he'd described electro-magnetic radiation, and then we'd trotted over to a neighbor's house where we'd covered the outside radio antenna leads with an iron magnet, forcing everyone inside to miss the great Joe Louis versus James J. Braddock fight that lasted fifteen rounds, and brought Braddock his second



championship heavyweight win from which he went on to become the greatest champion ever, before retiring his crown.

Jeramiah was still addressing me: "I've created the model which proves that space and time are one, just as is mass and energy. A model -- breadboard -- not mathematical. That's it," he pointed.

I'd studied long and diligently for that union card, the Ph.D., supposedly having proved competence as a creative and independent researcher, a man at the forefront of his field. Why couldn't I understand his blinking lights and trailing wires, and the violet pulsations?

Of course this was Jeramiah. Jeramiah Hill: brilliant, erratic, asocial, opinionated, capable, spoiled -- my new project leader -- my old friend.

"Here, I'll demonstrate," he said, pushing me to stand at a location where the floor was bordered with yellow paint. "Stay there." Violet lights continued to pulse and form-up.

He flipped a toggle-switch. Magnetic reel-tape started. He grunted when the tape stopped. "That's the best I can do for now. Later we'll condense signals, screen out noise with something," and he paused, looking far outward against a blank wall above the table. "Maybe the data will provide its own solution . . ." his voice trailing to silence.

Then, more lively: "Translation is the problem, of course." He transferred the tape to output printers that zipped along. "I've formulated some simplified homogeneous isomorphisms between dominate brain waves and the English language, reduced noise, but so much needs developed -- perhaps a linguist."

Clattering ceased. He ripped out the sheet, read it, laughed and handed it to me, saying, "Where the arbitrary symbols are printed represent undecipherables, but the rest is clear enough."

I read: "Aristotle's three laws of logic beautiful. Must impress Korzybski tackled first through general semantics will she date? everything is either A or not-A, the basis to our two-valued logic what's the logic of her curves law of consistency sole and final scientific God, for without consistency, we have nothing predictable."

Sure, I recognized my old college lecture, a standard on how Aristotle's three laws of thought had been modified by Korzybski's thinking and earlier by Tarski, with his multiple-valued logic, and how the law of consistency, that nothing is both A and not-A at the same time, still applied, and was the fundamental cornerstone for science, mathematics and applied logic.

Jeramiah mischievous? Had he selected random components of my standard lecture to confuse and confound me? Malicious? And why the apparent subjective thoughts intermingled?

"Your future thoughts," he explained, waiting.

He had to be joking again; I, the unwitting butt, again!

Yet it all came to pass, as I subsequently learned, when one day I was to show about a new most attractive female assistant. My speech and thoughts unwittingly matched his earlier recording, I became aware of this when I heard myself saying, ". . . for without consistency, we have nothing predictable."

I feigned sickness and went off to ponder. Prediction? Suggestion? Clever hypnotic implants?

On confronting Jeramiah, he simply argued that "Einstein had searched diligently for a unifying theory and means to test it; that linguistics had yet to solve invariants between languages, or syntax and vital meanings; and after all," he asked, "isn't that one of your pet speeches, as you've said it?"

"Didn't you think it? Do it?"

Then, bubbling onward: "Lacking a tested comprehensive mathematical statement of a unified field theory, how can one lone person know that he's tapping into axis translation, so that space and time are apparently twisted, and that thoughts actually transcend dimensionalities after all?"

It was simply too much for me to swallow.

Yet I had swallowed much of Jeramiah's other impulses from time to time, counting all the scars.



Jeramiah was Jeramiah, unfortunately, which meant that I was witnessing great scientific discoveries, or else a grand, complex hoax.

It must be a joke, a monstrous exercise, perhaps his idea of an initiation, I tried to convince myself.

He rattled on as if I'd swallowed it all. And his -- our -- next unwary experimental subject was researcher Robert S. McNamara, former Harvard Business School whiz who'd later transferred to science. A chair being placed at the proper spatial point, a yellow square painted on the floor, McNamara was seated in it and handed coffee while we "recorded future thoughts."

We got vague sentences about multiple-vitamins and yogurt. Undaunted, Jeramiah rewound the tape, quipping, "Beneath that logical mind lies a deeply buried neurosis."

Later, after Jeramiah refined his techniques, McNamara's "future thoughts" listed clearly axioms having to do with multiple logical states.

And so it went, person by person, our department head, for example, including "future thoughts" about a job move, which subsequently transpired.

As I struggled to reconcile my traditional, classical approach to matter, energy, space, and time, Jeramiah changed power ratios, increased sensitivities, decreased white noise, advanced rotations. . . . Months later our devoted sweat packaged everything into a portable unit slung over my back.

"We'll find richer brains, students concentrating on their thesis," Jeramiah explained, directing me to set up collegiate visits.

Of course we succeeded too well.

Jeramiah was not the kind to gloat, though his eyes might glisten wildly.

Our files mounted. Ideas were like others' pennies which Jeramiah reached for and successfully pocketed. No! He wasn't a mad scientist, nor was he likely to become one. He was still Jeramiah Hill: talented, spoiled, ego-centric, monotheistic -- that is, a believer in self.

We recorded a young Ph.D. candidate at the University of Turin who gave us marvelous classical physics equations that very nicely interpreted solid matter as a standing wave, called solitons.

A very young professor of economics at Marquette University wrote something called *The Verification of the World-Wide GATT Agreement*, which we filed away with imponderables and unusables.

Some medical student provided a long "future thought" dissertation on something -- some bacteria -- called, strangely, Legionaire's Disease which, we guessed, was to affect all army veterans.

In our files we stored advancements in physics, chemistry and electronics far beyond our ability to understand or manufacture, the final resolution of the universe's beginnings nicely described and mathematized, hints on possible gravity manipulation, bits and pieces of a future world both terrifying for its moral looseness and wonderful for its cohesiveness, the hint of cross-talk between stars. . . .

Jeramiah was greedy and secretive, which began to worry me. And he was always brooding of late.

I wrestled with my own ethical code: It was his invention. But the state had fundamental rights, too. Most importantly, was it fair to steal future ideas of others before they thought of them? If that's what they were? Perhaps Jeramiah had unconsciously constructed the perfect von Neuman computer. Or more likely, he'd tapped into a parallel universe of some sort, where the players, like myself, were almost the same, but not quite. If that were so, then he was not stealing exactly the same ideas, I tried to rationalize, but rather ideas very close.

I wrestled vainly until on awakening one night I thought I might have a solution that would play on Jeramiah's monstrous ego. If it didn't make everything worse, it might -- it just might -- well, rotate things a bit. My thinking, too, was beginning to breathe with his weird scientific explanations.

"What will those from whom you've taken ideas do with their own future?" I asked, when my thoughts were finally sure.



“They’ll go on from my work, and build further.” he snapped at me.

I could clearly see that he intended to claim every idea as his own, so my scruples cleared somewhat when I pointed out to him that the name of Jeramiah Hill would surely go down through history as one of the greatest scientists ever. “By the way,” I said as casually as possible, “Don’t you think it’s time to record your own future thoughts?”

He was jolted.

And it worked.

He became committed to measuring every future thought of his own most valuable future brainwaves.

I said nothing, but continued to watch.

There returned again the eager, almost boyish, devilish, dominating antics, and soon there followed flushes of dark red that virtually hid his freckles and caused his facial muscles to tauten and then to slacken, as though he were practicing the village idiot’s role.

I was there, but he refused me permission to read any of his future thoughts.

That night a fire flared on our floor, our rooms, those cabinets, burning every note, every important device, somehow melting down his great invention.

Of course I can’t duplicate it! I don’t know the principles, and I never understood its theory. I’m not entirely convinced that Jeramiah understood it either, but maybe so.

What happened to Jeramiah Hill?

He went off to work for some secret government project somewhere. Has to do with “gravity-slides” the literature reported, before the subject got classified.

Perhaps I delude myself when I think that I saved the world from Jeramiah Hill. Maybe he found something so important in his own future that he just couldn’t share it, even with me, his boyhood dupe. Maybe he’s saving the world from aliens, or from potential damage from inventions revealed too early.

Perhaps.

Perhaps.

Other times my mental pendulum swings again, and I shout, “Nonsense!” Jeremiah Hill was a classical case-history of the supreme egoist. He was asocial, without conscience except that requisite for self-preservation. I like to believe that I enticed him into looking into his own future thoughts where lay a vacuum. Why would he need creative thoughts if his life were to be devoted to picking up others’ pennies? No supreme egoist would live with himself knowing that ahead, in the future forevermore, were no creative thoughts, no great discoveries, no further contributions, no mysteries unravelled. His thoughts and inventions, after all, were his children, his genetic heritage, his genes becoming formulae and device and transcending limited DNA/RNA.

He had never asked what he could do for others, but what others could do for him.

I believe that when Jeramiah Hill read his own future thoughts, and found nothing of self-importance -- because his future thoughts relied on the children of other great brains -- his ego shattered and finally for a first time he matured, becoming accultured, a civilized human being, interdependent with the rest of us.

At least I continue telling myself so.

Signed,

John F. Kennedy, Ph.D.

on this

One hundred and thirty-fourth year

of the

Empire of the Rising Sun