



Alliance
Lake
Be Still...



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Timothy Jay

REDEMPTION 
P R E S S

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**Dedicated to those who leaned on their
own understanding early in their life's
journey and were tired of the results—crooked paths.**

Psalm 3:5-6

Acknowledgements

MY FIRST NOVEL IS all about life's journey. I can definitely affirm that writing is an extreme journey that has been incredibly fulfilling. I would like to thank several people for their love, support, and contributions.

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Please visit my social media for more of the backstory of this book and its characters. Enjoy the novel.

Email: Tim@TimothyJayAuthor.com

Website: www.TimothyJayAuthor.com

Facebook: facebook.com/AuthorTimothyJay

Instagram: [instagram/TimothyJayAuthor](https://instagram.com/TimothyJayAuthor)

☞ To the Reader

WHAT YOU ARE about to read is a work of fiction. The settings take place in many familiar places around the state of Ohio. There are many themes to discover, but one of them has to do with highlighting and reliving some of the nostalgic things that have all but disappeared over the last thirty to forty years.

Scott, one of the characters in the story, is also the narrator, and is thinking back on earlier years. He only inserts himself as this present-day narrator during the first half of the Prologue and all of chapter one.

Please enjoy this “coming of age” story learning about a group of six ordinary and ornery kids individually and together, forever bonded by a tragic event.

The characters and time periods have been notated at the beginning of each chapter for helpful reference.

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Prologue

(Scott's narration—present day and story in the future)

COMFORT CAN TAKE many forms and is very individual and unique. Soaking in a warm bath for you would be a wet coffin for me. Give this country boy a walk around a pond or small lake and my spirit is renewed. I can always find my center, my inner voice, that place that gives me peace. Whether I was walking the banks forty years ago with a pole in my hand, dropping a line and moving around to the next hopeful spot, or taking time to find those perfect stones to skip across the water to get the most out of defying gravity, I never minded going in circles. I always knew where I was heading—right back where I started. When I got back to the start, my time was up and the session was over. I had my inner conversation and worked it all out. My journey was complete, at least for that round.

Anyway, back then it was time to race home and find out if I was going to drink down, in a never-ending gulp, a gallon of the Country Time Lemonade or Tang from the full pitcher that Mom always kept in the refrigerator.

(Excuse me, but please indulge my rant. Whatever happened to Tang? Whatever happened to one of NA-SA's greatest contributions to all of mankind? Sure, all the GPS technologies, cordless tools, microwave ovens, and even memory foam are useful and very much still with us today, but the decade and a half of gluttonous Tang consumption by the generation that grew up on Schoolhouse Rock and Tuff Skins had to dry out and come down from the orange crystal-powder sugar high we were all on. Did I miss the episode of Miami Vice where Crockett and Tubbs seized control of the Tang crystal production in the U.S., and in one epic slow-motion automatic-gun death-spray battle ended the addiction to Tang for the kids of the 70s and 80s, replaced later by another addiction when we discovered Starbucks' Caramel Macchiato?

But seriously, what happened to us? We were too young in the 70s to understand the climate of the culture, and then again too young in the 90s for anyone to pay attention to us, when the subtle destruction was already happening. The 80s — this was the decade that changed my life and the lives of those I knew. I sadly reflect now about those who didn't realize how it came about, especially after seeing the Huxtables settle all their life's issues in a neat and tidy way until the next Thursday's must-see TV on NBC at 8:00 p.m., when they did it again.)

Okay, after getting that off my chest, let me get back to the story of Alliance Lake. Even though it hosted many of my fondest memories, there were also many secrets and tears that poured into those serene waters over time.

Dotted across our landscape are little oases of magnificent beauty and wonder. It is this very place where animals would

go if they could take a vacation. They would come here to my favorite lake—Alliance Lake. It was the type of lake that was just big enough to allow you to get lost in its various coves. It was that picturesque lake that was set way back in the woods. You could drive to it, but you had better slow down the last couple of miles to avoid a trip to the local mechanic for a new exhaust system or front-end alignment. Nature created the initial lake when it was carved out from the rushing water run-off that ran through the limestone rock. Then civil engineers decided to use more of the small valley floor for flood control, and a beautiful idyllic lake—Alliance Lake—was made.

Alliance Lake was a hidden jewel to most. I would guess nine out of ten people are oblivious to treasures like this around them. Why don't more people like to hunt for treasures? Why don't more people like to surround themselves with the strings of the many pearls found everywhere? Even today, kids enjoy a themed birthday party or the excitement of a pirate movie, but I don't think they really like treasure hunting. They might if given the chance, but the "captains" of their ship would not put the time into planning, training, and executing the hunt. So the "shipmates" don't have the patience when plans B, C, and D turn into a "Now what, Honey?" situation.

I guess "captains" in these modern days are not as inspired to find real treasures when virtual ones will do. Also, is mutiny on the Dodge Grand Caravan really worth it when there is only a three-and-a-half hour window before it's time for little Charlie to run down the soccer ball once again? Where is our sense of adventure and purpose to experience "the hunt"? Ah, well, it's exhausting trying to be captain of your own ship or SUV, whichever the case may be.

Well, if anyone did want to explore and uncover the jewel known as Alliance Lake, it would be totally worth it. But then you would have to be patient before you could tell anyone about it because of the isolated dilemma of not having any cell-phone

signal or service out there. That's right—even today if you go to my favorite “X marks the spot” place, you had better be fine with talking to yourself, or better yet, talking face-to-face with others. I know it sounds daunting, but believe me, there are other ways to stay connected than with batteries and signal strength bars.

Now, when I think about Alliance Lake, the memory that comes rushing back to me first is one that was told to me (that's right—I did not even personally witness this one). How strange! It was one of those times in life when someone tells you about something that happened, and because you spent so much time in that very location, you can imagine exactly what he or she is describing. You can vividly see it in your mind's eye. The sights, the sounds, and even the smells are as real as if you were there in person.

But please remember, I wasn't there. Maybe that is why what happened will never leave me—not even for a moment. As I have gotten older, life and all its circumstances have finally slowed down, which has allowed those characters known as perspective and wisdom to have their chance.



There wasn't anything special about that late summer day at Alliance Lake. It was the time of day when late afternoon passes into early evening, and when the light and colors are so vivid and perfect that artists and photographers only dream of capturing this fleeting image. Gentle breezes allowed every weeping willow tree to bend down and take their final drink for the day. Swallows were in their flying formations, swooping over the water to get their last meal for their families back at the nest. For the water bugs that escaped this siege, there was always a chance to hear a splash from a fish that ended his day with a lucky strike that did not include any hooks, lines, or sinkers.

Several brigades of ducklings followed their marching orders from their mothers-in-charge as they waddled into the water to be given their bedtime baths. Then, as the shadows lengthen, some of nature's four-legged regulars would show up at the water's edge. Families of raccoon, fox, and deer would begin to explore for their evening menu, stopping by for a cool drink before the main entrée; all the while, bullfrogs were warming up their deep voices for their night's performance. It was quite a fantastic showcase of sights and sounds that nature never requires you to applaud, but to simply be still and appreciate.

As the light began to dim, the shadows expanded into dusk. Even the air was heavier, as the wind was lying down for the upcoming nighttime. In the distance, mist began to slowly roll out her blanket and cover the valley. There are those who find this mist a cover of comfort, while others look at it as a restrictive hindrance to movement. As the mist turned to fog and was about to fully settle, all of a sudden, at the far end of the lake in one of those secluded coves, the suspended fog frantically stirred in all directions, and all creatures in the air and on land made a panicked dash to seek a safe haven elsewhere. The only thing that was visible by this time was a set of automobile headlights that were being muted by the fog.

It was too hard to take in any real detail concerning the vehicle at this point, let alone about those who were making the mysterious journey. Did someone take a wrong turn and not realize there was no way to drive back to a populated road? If it were kids looking to party, there would surely be a bonfire that would begin to flame. However, as the minutes went by, the scene only grew darker and darker. Who was out there? What purpose could anyone have at this lake during nightfall?

The next thing that could be heard was screams and gasps of breath from many different people. It was easy to let your imagination run wild with what could be happening down in

that cove as the screams and gasps turned to silence. About the time when you thought the worst, the clouds parted briefly to let the moonlight reveal something more. Again, the silence was broken with a ferocious amount of splashing, water bubbling, and churning everywhere. Arms and legs were flailing about in never-ending attempts to find refuge on something stable. Just as the light from the silvery moon began to shine the brightest, the clouds closed in to act like an eighteenth-century candle snuffer.

The light disappeared, but the sounds of gasping for air would not stop. The sounds could be heard over and over until the silence returned and nature's cadence resumed. Someone had to be responsible for what just happened, but who? The vehicle's lights could be seen again, but now only the two red rear lights were visible, leaving like a snake slithering off with his beady eyes fixed.

Chapter 1:

I N N O C E N C E L O S T

(Scott's narration—present day)

IT WAS 1975, AND America had lost her innocence; but I was still in the middle of mine. I was six years old. The worst thing I did was fight with my brothers. Generally, these fights consisted of everything from hiding G.I. Joe army men to stealing the prize out of the Honeycomb cereal box. But there was one fight with my brothers that forever changed me and made me understand my place in the family. It was a battle we had many times before, but this particular time was a Sunday morning when we were once again piling into the family wood-sided station wagon to go to church. There we were—the three of us—me and my brothers, the twins, Ryan and Shon. It was the battle for the rear-facing third seat in the back. The prized seat of honor in that giant boat of a car that popped up from below at most could only fit two small bodies. Once again, the fight was underway. We only had limited time to maneuver our strategic headlocks and noogies before Dad got in the car to back it out of the garage. We had better have our armistice terms worked

out and accepted by then, or Dad would pull off his belt and settle the dispute for us. We all knew we had to work fast with precision or it would be bad—very bad.

For some reason, my brothers did not come at me with force this time, and that may be why I gave up without retaliation and headed for the middle seat to be by myself. What they did to me that day was worse than giving me a black eye; they used words to cut through me to the heart. It was a missile that hit its target.

They told me that I was adopted, which I already knew, but they said it in such a mean way. They told me that I was lucky to even be a part of their family and not rotting in some deep dark dungeon. I ultimately knew that they were right and it was true. Well, at least everything except the rotting in some deep dark dungeon part; I was hoping that wasn't true. Kids can be cruel, and after all, this was for supremacy of the rear-facing seat in the woody station wagon, and they pulled out all the stops.

So there I was in the middle, no one paying attention to me. Mom and Dad were in the front seat facing forward, driving to our destination, and my brothers were laughing and looking out the back window at where we had been. And where we had been, as a family, was really confusing, but let me try and sort it out quickly.

My brothers and I were the same age. As I said, they're twins. Beginning when I was quite young, Mom explained our family to others in the following way: I was the gift of theirs that required a "God-awful" amount of paperwork, while the twins were a surprise "gift from God."

After hearing it over and over, I didn't see the humor that my mom was trying to convey. She and Dad were struggling to start a family; I get that. She went to many doctors and had many procedures, but still with no luck. By 1968, their hope turned to despair when a last-ditch experimental effort did not produce a pregnancy, so they agreed to start the adoption process. When they received word late that same year that a baby boy,

me—Scott— would be available to them by early in the new year, they were happy. I figured it was only a few nights after receiving this news that they in fact became pregnant. Maybe the pressure was finally off them, and well, *surprise!* Yes, the twins were born later that same year in 1969, and the Huff family totaled five.

As I realized much later in life, the one thing I really wanted was unconditional love and acceptance. I wished my adopted family would have treated me like that of an Indian-captive English boy during the French and Indian War. Being a student of American history, I've always been drawn to the many true accounts of Indian tribes taking young boys captive after killing their families during frontier raids. The boys then became the sole replacement for a child they had lost due to disease or warfare. There was a very common adoption ceremony that was performed: a young captive was taken into a stream up to his waist, and then the young squaws would begin to wash him down.

The purpose of this ritual was to show that every drop of white blood had been washed out of him, and he was officially a member of the Indian family, with all rights, privileges, and responsibilities as the person he replaced. From that day forward, they were literally treated as though they had been born into the tribe; nothing short of a prisoner swap would get them out of this culture, but even then, there was often great reluctance from the captive to return to “civilization.”

I learned early on that the pecking order was the twins, Ryan and Shon, first, followed by me. And after that last car-seat battle, I resigned myself to the fact that they had indeed won the war, and my place in the family was to be there, but not too much there. I could come along, but my best role was to be the family historian. I was not to be a reporter, mind you, for reporters asked questions and were curious. I knew my place. I was a historian, only there to observe what had already taken place; and believe me, there was a lot more history to share. Ironically, it started later that very same morning in church.

Arriving at church always felt a little like the first day of school, with the anticipation of whether or not it would be just like it was when we were there last, with all the same familiar kids. I would soon find out, but first we had to stop off at the coatrack area to watch Mom and Dad pull themselves together and sneak a peek to see if “Dad’s seats” were still available in the back row. If we did not get those seats, Dad would grumble the rest of the day that people should just know that those seats were for him and his family. Mom and Dad expected us to sit together as a family every time we were there.

I can remember like it was yesterday following my parents into the sanctuary behind Mrs. Jennings. Mrs. Jennings was a fancy lady who always tried to lead the way when it came to fashion trends, even though she was old—much older than my mom. She was also very plump, and let me tell you, fashion styles of the mid-70s did not flatter anyone, let alone someone who looked like the housekeeper Alice from *The Brady Bunch*, but was the size of Aunt Bee from *The Andy Griffith Show*.

You would hear Mrs. Jennings before you would see her. This was not because she talked loudly or talked a lot, but because you would hear the sound of an overly tight polyester skirt rubbing against her nylon pantyhose at the legs. I was always concerned that with all those different synthetic garments and the friction taking place as she walked, we were looking at a very real public-safety fire-hazard threat. I have seen Boy Scouts start fires with much less.

I’m sorry, but I told you my role was a historian, and seeing Mrs. Jennings every Sunday only proved to me that the fashion police had clocked out and had been at the donut shop for the past decade. Who could possibly think that a loose-fitting, long macramé vest over a tight long-sleeved cowl-neck collar shirt with a multi-shade-of-throw-up brown plaid skirt was a good idea? Anyone? I didn’t think so.

I guess I could also mention her hairdo while I'm at it. It was not just Mrs. Jennings, but most ladies at that church had hairdos that were huge. I thought hair for a woman was supposed to adorn them and complement them. Well to me as a child, the older ladies at my church all looked like they were trying to create shade for those sitting around them. Their hair was either very high, very wide, or both. And to achieve these sculpted masterpieces of girth, they spent all day at the "beauty" salon undergoing various follicle torture treatments and devices.

The results were hairdos in the styles of the Beehive, the Flip, and the Bouffant, or combinations thereof. Picture Dolly Parton in the mid-70s from the hair up. Believe me—the hair was the only comparison to Dolly. They sure didn't look or sing like Miss Dolly (sigh).

Anyway, even in a stiff breeze, the individual hairs could only manage to move in unison due to the amount of aerosol-released hairspray, or better yet, glue on their head. Now I really know who created the ozone problem and ushered in the greenhouse gas effect that we have been dealing with. It was not big industrial factories spewing carbon monoxide smog, but those vain women of the 60s and 70s!

Once we got our seat, the thing I would notice most was the smell. Maybe church seats are called pews because you are sitting close to other people and you can smell everything about them. For instance, there was the Conrad family. They lived on a farm, and I knew exactly who fed the animals that very morning. I don't think they realized that wiping their shoes off in the grass a few times does not qualify for clean Sunday shoes.

Then there was the Stevens family. They had a never-ending row of kids. It seemed like every other week they had another kid in tow. Besides the number of bodies in that family, I think they must have been one of the final holdouts to use cloth diapers over disposable. Their infants and toddlers would never be

changed until they all had to be changed. I'm certain the older kids just let them sit in yesterday's supper until it was time to take them to the nursery, after we had sung exactly five songs. Believe me, I perfected singing and breathing out of my mouth at the same time.

Besides the smells of the very young, I never liked the smell of the elderly. There was something different about it. My first thought was it must be a touch of death beginning to take hold of them, but when Mr. Moorehead, the organ player, continued to show up each and every Sunday for years, I chalked up his smell to him not getting his Saturday night bath like I had to have. Also, maybe his "smell test" was not as strict as my mom's.

Then there were old ladies like Mrs. Frazer who poured on the perfume to mask their "old person" smell. I really think the concoction of old person smell and "Eau de Avon Lady" began the chemical reaction of the embalming process for undertakers. In the meantime, though, it was very toxic for the rest of us.

All the usual kids were sitting with their parents singing the last of what seemed to be the twenty-seventh stanza of "Amazing Grace," the fifth song, when I heard those sweet words from the song leader: "The children are dismissed to go to children's church." Like a mad dash for freedom, the children raced out, leaving the parents to pick up the crayons and other debris left in our wake.

We were heading up to the best part of church. All the kids knew the routine, and Mr. Ross made it fun—very fun. There were three round tables in our room for the six-year-olds to gather around. Only six little bodies could sit at each table, and as if an unspoken rule was already known by those three little ladies and three ornery gentlemen, the six most popular kids who sat together every class were Ryan, Shon, Joel, Beth, Mandy, and Colleen.

I would consider myself friends with those six popular kids, but I was never popular. I guess I was too quiet to be popular, so I took my place right next to their table and listened to every word they said and every laugh they uttered. In fact, everyone else from the other tables was focused on their table, too. It just felt more interesting, more relevant, and more fun. Occasionally, they would get me involved with their table, but I still had to remember that I belonged at the other table.

I don't know what it was about this certain Sunday at children's church that I remember it so well, but Mr. Ross came in after we had settled into our usual seats at our usual tables and started class off by asking us if we were happy today. The kids at the popular table screamed and carried on like they were beyond happy, maybe even a little more wild and crazy because they were glad to be away from their parents for an hour. So Mr. Ross, with a very serious tone started the lesson by saying, "If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands."

Immediately, everyone knew that his tone was a trick, but it worked. We clapped our hands, but the kids at the popular table showed the most animation. We clapped when we were supposed to, but their entire bodies were noisemakers. As we went through the song and got to the final line, "If you're happy and you know it, then your face will surely show it. If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands." *Clap, clap.*

Then the next verse came up and Mr. Ross looked at Shon and sang, "If you're happy and you know it," and then paused so Shon could say something. Shon thought for a second and then blurted out, "Stomp your feet!" At the beginning of the next verse, Mr. Ross looked at Ryan, who immediately chimed in with "Spin in a circle!" Next, he looked at Colleen, who said, "Fly like a bird!" By this time, those at the popular table made it their right to continue the pattern. Mandy went next and

screamed, “Jump real high!” Joel was next, and he wanted us to “Shake someone’s hand!” To finish the song, Mr. Ross gently instructed Beth to “Say amen” to signal the end.

After we sang the rest of the songs, it was time to start the lesson. Mr. Ross pulled out a flannel board, the church’s 1970s version of a video. Everyone fought to help the teacher reenact the Bible story and lesson. The lesson that is so vivid in my head was the lesson on Moses and the burning bush. As Mr. Ross opened the flannel board, the kids from the popular table lunged at him and began to fight over the flannel pieces.

When the scrum was over, Ryan, Mandy, and Joel had all the pieces between them. They began to help show Moses heading cautiously toward a flaming bush that wasn’t being consumed. Then God spoke to him, telling Moses to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. The kids switched the standing Moses to the kneeling Moses, but without his sandals, as Mr. Ross continued to tell the story. Something about the flannel-board stories usually made us settle down.

Just as I now remember that image of the burning bush and those popular kids around the Sunday school table, it wasn’t hard for me to remember each of them twelve years later during a late summer party for the graduating seniors. It was a way for everyone to say goodbye before some went off to college, and before we all headed out for the next phase of our lives. We met up at the usual teen party spot, Alliance Lake. A fire was always burning, providing the only peer-approved light and heat for miles.

I can’t forget to describe the music that we had playing. Someone would bring his latest boom box with an endless supply of cassette tapes and D-cell batteries. For an end-of-the-summer party such as this, you bet there was plenty of drinking, smoking, and experimenting of all kinds. Some might wonder how we could get cigarettes and alcohol. Well, it was the mid-80s,

and cigarettes came out of a vending machine at every sit-down restaurant. And besides the Marlboro man, there was the role model of the “Kool.” As far as alcohol, let’s just say that store-keepers weren’t worried about looking at IDs too closely. If the money was green and you picked up the lightweight stuff, then who could get hurt, right?

There was a lot more scary stuff being introduced to our young teenage minds about sex than about alcohol and smoking combined. We were at the age when hormones and morals are at constant war with each other. Images were not stagnant on the page any longer or being made up in our heads; we could now scream in unison, “I want my MTV!” If seeing a video from Van Halen, Madonna, or Bon Jovi couldn’t get you thinking about the opposite sex in a way that would change your body temperature, then there was no hope for you.

Yes, it did look like hormones would win the struggle everywhere, but then an A-bomb was dropped into our laps that made many of us think twice. The A-bomb was AIDS. Everyone at that time was trying to get answers and hoped to find a way to contain it as one of those annoying STDs to put up with. And with all that to process, I thought it best to say, “Pass me another beer,” while I hoped that she would let me get on base—any base!

It was well after eleven o’clock and the music was fading. People were either ready to mellow out, or we ran out of batteries. Many of the cars had started to head back to town. As I walked up to the fire to get warm, I saw those same six kids from a decade ago around this fire that was quickly being consumed. Ryan had no problem yelling at me to get more wood. As I quietly bowed out of the group to find more wood, I noticed each of their faces were in a trance, staring at the hypnotic glow of the embers. Just like those flames intertwining, those kids had no idea how critical and intertwined their lives would be with each other.

My eyes, however, were fixed on Mandy as I backed away. What was she thinking? Well, if she was like me, she was re-playing the last decade in her head. And to be honest, each of us have not always been ready to sing the “Happy and You Know It” song.