

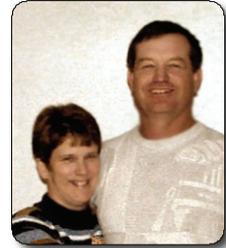
CHAPTER 7 – COLORADO

Our next move was in 1977 to Englewood, Colorado a suburb of Denver. This was occasioned by a job offer from Barnhill Associates, a company servicing electronic equipment manufactured by John Fluke Company where Roy was employed. Roy was now to be the regional customer service manager out of the Denver office for the mid-western states area.



During July, Roy and I made a trip to Denver to interview at Barnhill Associates and to house hunt. We found a very nice home with five bedrooms! A virtual castle compared to the size of the two-bedroom home we had at the time!

The actual move was made over the Labor Day weekend in September. On our route to Colorado, we were able to be in Pomeroy for the wedding of my brother Keith to Shelley Burt, his high school sweetheart.



On the right is a recent photo of them.



This has been our home now for more than 30 years. Since I had never lived in any house more than four years, when we reached the four-year mark in this house, the old moving urge hit me again! I began to feel that we had to make a move of some kind, maybe to a bigger house. The kids were growing up, they had more friends around all the time.

Anything became an excuse in my mind to look at other places that were for sale. But as time passed, and we did not move, I became content to stay here in this good place that God has given to us.

We found Holly Hills Bible Church on the first Sunday morning that we were in our new home. Roy looked in the yellow pages for churches advertising they had a good teaching emphasis. After calling several and asking questions about the teaching, one finally sounded like what we were looking for. We hopped in the car, attended the services and stayed for 9 years. The lady who answered the phone that morning was Travis Lee, church secretary and mother of Doris Lowther.



Our church had lots of youth activities for our family during this time. AWANA was helping them learn Bible verses and stories, while having great fun. The basement fellowship hall became a sort of gymnasium play center and Ruth enjoyed helping out when she could.

Our kids went to Walnut Hills grade school only 3 blocks away from home. Our street was full of boys at the time so there were playmates. We had a huge garden in the back yard and when not planted the kids played soccer on the dirt. If they got muddy I hosed them off and sent them home at dinner time!



In 1979 a movie titled *The Black Stallion* came out in the theaters. The boy playing the lead role looked so much like our son, that Steve was asked by strangers if he was the one who had been in the film. There is such a likeness between the two boys that years later watching the movie is to almost believe that we are looking at Steve.

One of Ruth's closest friends has always been Robin Strauss who was deaf but has become hearing impaired now after advances in medicine made it possible. The girls learned some sign language just for fun, but Robin was able to lip read very well so did not use sign herself.



During the summer following eighth grade, Ruth had surgery to straighten her left leg. That took six months to heal. The next summer surgery was done on the right leg. That took seven months to heal. When that cast finally came off, it was cold and wintry. She was instructed to walk with one crutch to provide more stability.



One morning six weeks later, as she made her way to the school bus, she fell on some ice that was still on the sidewalk from a recent snowfall. As she fell she heard the crack of her leg breaking! A neighbor who was walking her two dogs was approaching just as she fell. When Ruth screamed, the woman's dogs began to growl at her. The woman told Ruth to stop screaming or her dogs would bite her! Still crying, Ruth said that her leg had broken. The woman told her to stop being silly, of course it hadn't! Then she stomped away dragging her dogs into her house.

Another neighbor came out of his house across the street, tried to help Ruth up but slipped and fell down pulling Ruth down again with him! The ambulance finally arrived to carry Ruth to the hospital where she stayed for three days. Another cast was put on and this time it took eight months for her leg to heal. After each additional trauma, the healing time lengthened for her. Experiencing corrective surgery turned out to be a very long and tedious three years for Ruth.



**Ruth, Class of 1981
Randall Moore School**

All this difficulty combined with some learning disability, caused Ruth to fall further and further behind in school. After this fall, we took her out of the public high school so she could attend Randall Moore School of Denver, which had an individualized and accelerated program. With the help she received there, her progress rapidly improved to the extent that she graduated high school a year ahead of her class.

After Ruth's graduation, the 6 of us went on a summer vacation in a rented RV. It had a bed above the cab that the kids could lay on and look out the front while we traveled. We shot off fireworks in Wyoming, visited Yellowstone Park, had some time with the family in Washington and visited the ocean in Oregon and California, visited family in Phoenix and then come home via the Four Corners and western Colorado. It was a wild time of fun for us.

Our lives were quite busy during these years with music lessons, church, soccer and medical needs.

We were adjusting to the suburban life and enjoying it.



Music lessons for everyone



A major medical problem began for Steve when he developed ulcerative colitis at about age 11. He had a very difficult time of it. At first the drug sulphamethoxazole was used to treat him, but he developed a terrible rash all over his body in an allergic reaction.

For more than a week he slathered himself with creams in an effort to relieve the itching, a constant torment for him.

The next drug of choice was prednisone which eventually brought the colitis under control. Frequent visits to the clinic, medication and tests finally paid off with healing after more than 2 years. When that was finally stable, Steve was slowly weaned off the prednisone.

On a ski trip with a group from church, he had a bad fall, breaking his leg with a spiral fracture. He was hospitalized for a couple days in a cast. He healed well and the next season he was on the slopes again, loving every minute of it. He later taught his two younger brothers to ski.

A broken upper arm was one of only two medical issues Vernon had while growing up. He fell on his elbow one day when riding his skateboard at a friend's house up a ramp in the street. Something he had been instructed not to do.

At about the age of 13, Vernon developed a pneumothorax which is a hole in the lung that lets air leak from the lung into the membrane that covers each lung. It causes chest pain and can cause the lung to collapse. He was playing the trumpet in the school jazz band at the time. In order to allow it to heal, he had to quit playing the trumpet. We were told it usually occurs in young males who use their lungs strenuously in such things as sports or playing musical instruments.



FREE ENTERPRISE

The years of 1980 to 1981 became years of big changes for us when Roy's employer, Barnhill Associates sold the customer service center, where Roy was manager, back to John Fluke Company. The transition was to take about a year to finalize.



Learning a new trade

Roy had always thought it would be nice to be self-employed, so he decided to give it a try. So, in 1981 Roy started a small printing company, Acorn Press Inc.

He kept his job for one more year while he acquired equipment and taught himself how to print. At that time our part of unincorporated Arapahoe County remained mostly residential with lots of open space. There was very little, if any, competition for the printing industry.



With lots of hard work our little company was going well, growing at a pretty good pace and we had lots of customers! Gradually our house was taken over by machinery and jobs in process of being assembled.



Tait collating pages

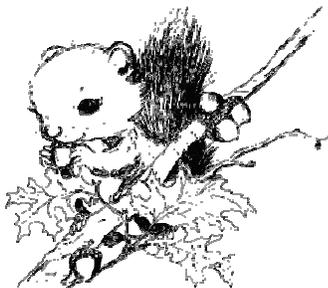
The entire family was involved in the work and even the neighborhood youngsters earned money helping us out.

Eventually we were bursting at the seams, had seven employees, 2 presses, a dark room and camera... well you get the idea, we had to move Acorn Press Inc. out of our home!



Printing in garage, layout, camera, office, etc in the basement

In 1983, we found a place within walking distance of our home, took out a lease for space and moved in. What a difference! Now we could leave the work behind and come home to a real home at night.



Acorn logo drawn by Barbara, Roy's sister



Moving in to the new location, dad Smith helped us rewire, build shelves for supplies and walls to provide separate places for offices.

We were really glad to have this location in which to work so close to home.



Roy mounts the new sign

When we were first doing the start up of Acorn Press, Inc. in 1981, we were given a grey and white cockatiel bird with yellow cheeks. Her name was Candy and she became a much loved member of our family. Candy had a cage that she stayed in at night but was loose in the house much of the time during the day. She loved to ride around on anyone's shoulder, and we got so used to her being there that we would forget about her. She came to the table when we ate, often going from plate to plate picking off a noodle or other tidbit for herself. She especially loved spaghetti.



Candy loved ice cream!

Another favorite was ice cream! Candy would land on a shoulder, then walk down our arm to take ice cream from our spoon. She seemed to enjoy putting her little parrot nose into an ear, close her eyes and mumble little "bird words of love" into our ear.

On two occasions Candy got loose outside. The first time Roy walked out of the house with her on his shoulder forgetting that she was there. When I got his attention, he was able to come back inside without her flying away.

The second time she got outside it was because I opened the back door without noticing where she was. She flew out and onto a telephone wire in the back yard. I tried to coax her down by taking her cage out, calling to her and rattling her food. But she just sat there for maybe a half hour.

The kids came outside with me, all of us watching and calling to her. Eventually she flew away over the house and up the street. We all took off running after her, but she was too fast for all of us except Steve. He was able to keep her in his sights and followed her into the back yard of a neighbor up the block. She landed high up in a tree there. He climbed carefully up the tree, getting as close as he could without scaring her away.

She sat watching him while he climbed, talking to her quietly until he got close enough to reach out and grab her. He stuffed her inside his T-shirt, scampered down the tree as fast as he could and ran home holding her against his chest inside his shirt. He was so excited and proud of himself! I was so happy I cried! Needless to say, we clipped her wings right away!

WHAT IS GOING ON?

Continuing with Steve's history, shortly after the colitis cleared up, Steve developed a cough that did not go away. Over a period of months, he coughed more and more. Doctors at the University Hospital said it might be asthma, checking him numerous times, but he continued to slowly grow worse.



Early in the summer of 1983 our family made a trip to Warrenton, Missouri to the mission headquarters of Child Evangelism Fellowship. Ruth was to attend a training session there in preparation for a summer of ministry in children's Bible clubs in Scotland.



On the way to Missouri, we made a one night stop at the home of friends who had a small farm. Our children enjoyed seeing their farm and their several animals.

Following several weeks of training at the CEF Institute, Ruth and five other summer missionaries flew as a group to Glasgow, Scotland where they separated into teams of two persons each to live with local families and do children's Bible clubs in various cities.

After the rest of us returned home from our short trip to Missouri, and while Ruth was out of the country, Stephen was continuing to cough and going to clinic appointments. His cough worsened week by week. He was becoming extremely thin.



We felt like the doctors were grasping at straws trying to figure out what was wrong with Steve. They said perhaps he had a rare bovine allergy from exposure to the animals during our brief visit in Missouri, or perhaps Psittacosis, an allergy to our bird. The problem with it being a bovine allergy was that he had been coughing for many months, not just since our short trip to Missouri.

Steve had by now become so weak that he could no longer ride his bike. He had stopped going to shoot baskets with his friends at the local school. He lay around the house constantly. That was so unlike him! He was always very active, hardly able to sit still for any length of time.

I do not even recall now what tests were being done during his clinic appointments. All I remember is that each time we went to clinic they could not tell us anything conclusive and a return visit to clinic was scheduled for a week or two later. As the weeks passed, Steve ate less and less and began to vomit during meals because of nausea. Soon he was eating almost nothing.

By the end of July he could hardly walk because of weakness and shortness of breath. His doctor listened to his chest and checked him over a bit, then left the room, returning with another doctor. The second doctor, who had not ever seen Steve before, looked him over and listened for some time to his chest. They both left the room then, saying they would be right back. When they returned, they told us that Steve's heart was beating much faster than what was a normal speed! At that rate, they said he could have a heart attack soon.

Steve was immediately admitted to the hospital and put on oxygen. A drip of high calorie liquid food was put into him via a tube down the nose and throat to the stomach. At first Steve kept vomiting the liquid back up until the drip was adjusted to a very slow rate. He was so thin, down to 78 pounds yet standing as tall as Roy.

As he was monitored for two weeks in the hospital, tests showed that he had many more than the usual number of white blood cells in his system. The oxygen eased his heart rate and eased his shortness of breath, but otherwise he remained the same.

The doctors wanted to start him back on prednisone, but were afraid to do that in case what he had in the lungs was a viral infection. In the case of a viral infection, they told us, prednisone would be the same as putting gasoline on a fire. What was really needed was to get a lung biopsy in order to find out if it was an infection or not. Surgery was scheduled for August 14th the day after his birthday.

While all these things were going on, Ruth was completing her summer ministry in Scotland. She arrived home on August 13, which was Steve's 15th birthday and the day before Steve was to have surgery. Steve was so bored of sitting in the hospital day after day, that he was allowed to go with the family to meet Ruth at the airport. He had to go with an oxygen tank along. He was so thin and sickly looking, that Ruth was quite alarmed.



Open chest surgery was done on Steve the next day. An incision was made from almost the center of his back just below the bottom of the shoulder blade, around the side and curving along the ribs to half way across the front. While they were in there the surgeons took fluid from Steve's stomach for testing to find out what was going on there.

They discovered that his stomach was full of bile from the gall bladder. That was what had been making him vomit, causing nausea so badly he could not keep food down, not even the liquid diet he was receiving unless the intravenous drip was adjusted to very slow.

The biopsy from the lungs showed that the white blood cells in Steve's lungs were not caused by an infection nor were there any antigens from the bird as a cause. However, exactly what they were caused by remained a mystery. The only medication at that time that would control such a problem was what had been used for Steve all along, prednisone. So now, knowing that it was not an infection, the prednisone was immediately begun again. Steve stayed in the hospital for another two weeks while the nasal feeding tube continued to slowly feed him 24 hours a day.

Following surgery Steve slowly improved and we began to be hopeful again! We looked forward to bringing him home with us. He was sick and tired of being in the hospital. As his health improved, Steve became cranky with the nurses trying to change the tube down his nose so had begun doing it himself whenever it needed to be changed. He had also begun sticking his own fingers for blood because he said they often had to do it more than once.

There was a lot of discussion among the doctors during these weeks when Steve was hospitalized. We did not understand enough of it to determine what was conjecture and what was really true. This whole month in the hospital as well as the months of coughing which preceded it, were full of confusion and anxiety for us as we watched our son suffer. One doctor went so far as to tell us that even though we had gotten rid of the bird, try as hard as we might, we would never be able to get rid of the antigens that had caused the illness. They would remain in our house forever because they would be on everything! We could never rid ourselves of them even by painting over them.

The cause of his problem continued to be under investigation. Since parrots are known to cause just the condition that Steve was suffering, even though there were no antigens from the bird in his lungs, as a precaution, we had to give our bird away. The person who took the bird was Brian, Steve's hospital roommate, who was Steve's age. Brian was a kidney dialysis patient who had been hospitalized for some surgery. The next few days, imagination took over from what the doctor said. We envisioned our books, linens, clothes, drapes, carpets, walls...everything contaminated by something that would be deadly to our son if he ever came home again! Fear grew larger and larger in our minds, especially in mine. I soon thought that the only solution to our problem was a fire! Take off our clothes, walk out the door and set fire to the house and everything in it, if we ever wanted to be able to live with our son again!

The next time we were able to talk with the doctor I asked if he fully realized just what he had implied. He said that yes, he had thought about it and that we had to come up with a solution that was reasonable and livable... No doubt!

Because we had had a printing company in our basement, a team of medical people came to our home to investigate the inks and chemicals that were used in printing. They decided that none of it was the likely cause. They told us that the best course of action would be to scrub the house and everything in it as best we could. Upon hearing of this need, a number of ladies at Holly Hills Bible Church volunteered to help us with the project.

A team of dear women arrived one morning at the house, equipped with pails, scrub brushes and lots of elbow grease. Among them were Doris Lowther and her mother Travis Lee. They worked like troopers, washing down our walls, the insides of our closets, the furniture, the floors, every place they could get at. Scrubbing, mopping, dusting, wiping; they labored energetically on our behalf! We deeply appreciated their help. We could never have accomplished the task without them!



Doris & Art Lowther

Having said that, I have to admit that I personally was deeply humiliated to have other people sorting through my closets, finding our personal dirt. There can be times in life when we must learn that our pride and privacy are really trivial, unimportant matters. Our lives were not in our own control at this time in our history. They were in the control of whatever medical people told us we had to do.

As we neared the day for Steve to be released from the hospital, with our excitement mounting, we were told that Steve still could not return to our home! Even though our home had been investigated in detail and scrubbed, it had not been determined exactly what was causing his lung condition. The doctors felt that Steve would need to live elsewhere for a period of at least three months, maybe longer. We were horrified!

During that time, Steve would stay on the prednisone pills until his lungs recovered from whatever had caused the white blood cells, which are antibodies, to increase and attack his lungs. When Steve got to that point in his recovery, he would be slowly weaned off the prednisone pills. If he remained healthy after stopping medication and while still living elsewhere, it would mean that something in our home was indeed the cause. If that happened our home would have to be investigated further in the effort to discover what had made him sick. On the other hand, if he became sick again while living some place else, it would mean that the cause was within his own body, rather than from anything in our house.

Our hearts were broken and filled with fear that maybe we would end up losing our son to our environment after all. Upon learning of this development, two families in our neighborhood offered to have Steve live with them. The only way now that we could spend time with our son, was to sit outside on our porch with him or go to the home where he was staying to visit with him there.



One dear family who lived right across the street, Bob and Sandy Palmer and their three children Nicole, John and James, were to have Steve part of the time.



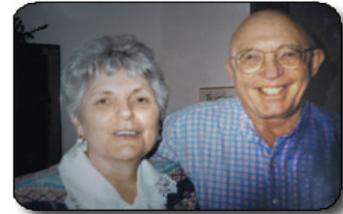
Steve with Jon Odalen



Nancy & Bernie Odalen

Steve's best friend Jon and his parents, Bernie and Nancy Odalen, offered to have him the rest of the time. Paul and Pat Giles had Steve with them on many weekends.

With these very generous arrangements in place, Steve was able to begin his freshman year at Cherry Creek High School.



Pat & Paul Giles

Being able to spend any time with our son over the next months was difficult! Sometimes he would come over to our house and we would sit out on the front porch together to talk. On a number of occasions the other families had us over for meals. The Odalen family hosted us for Thanksgiving Day.



Dave Berg, a friend from church, arranged for us to use a cabin in the mountains for a few days after the Christmas holidays so that we could be together with Steve in a different environment than our own home. It snowed a lot that holiday season, which is not always the case for Christmas in Denver!

In January 1984 Stephen was finally healthy enough to be slowly weaned off the prednisone pills, a slow process over several weeks. He felt good, was no longer coughing and we were all very optimistic that he would soon be coming home with us and would remain well in the future.

Steve continued living with the other families and we all counted the days for his return home. Before the month of January had passed, however, he began coughing again! Back to the clinic we went for more tests and were told that the reoccurrence of coughing (while he lived in a place other than our home) indicated that the cause of his condition was not in our house, which was a great relief to hear. Instead it was being caused by his own system, which was not so great to hear!

Having lived in places other than our home for the past six months, Steve was now allowed to return home, to his own room, and his own stuff, and his own family! It was a joyous event, even though it was tinged with a bit of fear of the future, which we avoided discussing within the family.

Steve began taking prednisone again, going to frequent clinic appointments and life returned to normal for us all as much as possible. Stephen continued to be checked in clinic frequently as this latest episode of coughing was gradually brought under control again.



Family - Ruth's birthday 1984

Eventually the University Hospital transferred Steve to the clinic at National Jewish Hospital, which specializes in respiratory conditions. He was seen there frequently and remained in good health for the next couple years, even after he eventually was able to quit taking prednisone.

Steve had now become a mouth breather, which is common among people with respiratory difficulties. He had lost a portion of his lung function and we were told that damage to the lungs would not ever heal.

There was one very brief episode when tests done during a visit to clinic showed too much protein in Steve's urine. The doctor mentioned the possibility that Steve's immune system might be attacking his kidneys. More tests would be done in clinic the following week. As we waited for that clinic date to arrive, we were once again immersed in fear for Steve's health. Because of watching the problems and sufferings of Brian, who had been Steve's hospital roommate who had no kidneys of his own, it was frightening to think of kidney problems possibly developing for Steve.

Much to everyone's surprise and huge relief, tests the following week showed the protein was within normal limits. Our God knows how much we can endure, as well as having a plan for Steve that did not include that particular complication at that time in his life. What sweet relief and gratitude filled our hearts at the lifting of that latest fear for our son!

The Summer of 1984 Ruth was helping with Child Evangelism Fellowship's Good News Clubs in homes in downtown Denver, one of which was in the home of Curtis and Mavis Holmes and their two children Jay and Marilyn.



Ruth with Jay & Marilyn

Ruth wanted more Bible training and after discussing Bible School options with Roy and others, she decided to attend New Tribes Bible Institute in Waukesha, WI for two years. Off she went in the fall of 1984, attending until the spring of 1986.

During her last few weeks at NTBI, Child Evangelism Fellowship asked Ruth to be part of their training staff in Colorado. She also worked with us part time for a year in the printing business, then taught CEF training workshops for the next 5 years.



I took this photo of my guys when we took a trip to the mountains on a cold summer day.

Steve's first car from working in a restaurant was in need of a bit of work to get running. Tait and Vern helped out in this project.

Steve would pack up and go for small trips to the mountains or show off the car with friends like Jeff Tieman shown here.



Steve & first car with Jeff Tieman



Roy & boys get first car running for Steve

Steve had friends over often and enjoyed camping out in the back yard a lot.

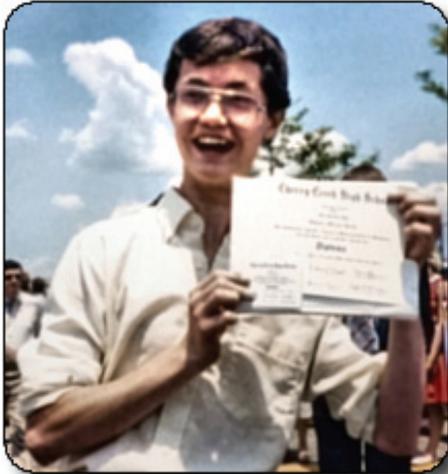


As the years passed there came a time at our church when most of the young people went away to college. Ruth was the only high school graduate who was still attending. Steve and one other boy were the only ones in high school still attending. Ruth and Steve went looking for a church with a program for young people and found Grace Chapel, which was then a small, new church. Ruth and Steve attended Grace Chapel for about two months in the spring of 1986, then we followed them. We had always gone to church as a family, being without two of our children was strange for us.

It wasn't long before Roy was helping with the sound system at Grace. As the next years passed, the church had a tremendous growth spurt. It became necessary to hold services in the gymnasium of Isaac Newton Middle School just across the street from the church.



Still it grew in numbers of people attending until finally there were three Sunday services at the school, in addition to classes for all ages and nursery. There were lots of activities to be a part of and the friends made there and fellowship we had with them is a treasure remembered.



**Stephen Michael Smith
Class of 1986**

In May 1986 Steve graduated from Cherry Creek High School, possibly the best day of his life thus far!

For one month during the summer of 1986, Steve and Brad Becketl vacationed in Saskatchewan Canada with Paul and Pat Giles who were there as missionaries.



Paul & Pat Giles

The boy's return flight to Denver was cancelled because Frontier Airlines had closed down that day! The boys were marooned at the airport in Regina! Paul and Pat had dropped the boys at the airport and begun their return trip to the north when they heard the news on the radio. Turning their car around, they drove back to the airport to help the boys get routed back home via Minneapolis on another airline.



Northern Pike fish caught in two days by Steve and Brad Becketl. Quite a catch!

The winter of 1986 Steve worked in Keystone, a ski resort in Colorado. He lived in dormitory housing and was able to ski for free during his off time. In addition to the daytime skiing, Keystone also had the first night skiing in Colorado.

One drawback to working at Keystone was that Steve had to work on Christmas. So he was unable to be with us for the holiday. Roy's family in Phoenix wanted very much for us to join them for Christmas. But Roy was working so much in the print shop; he was unable to get away. We decided that Ruth and I would drive to Phoenix with the younger boys, Tait and Vernon. It was a very strange Christmas to be separated as we were!

Meanwhile, our printing company was having a more difficult time financially as the months passed. One reason was that there were by this time at least ten other small printing companies in our area.

By August 1987 we had to move out of our commercial offices. The overhead was killing us. We had to let most of our employees go too.

We moved the company back home, into the garage and basement where it had been when we first started. It was a very hard pill to swallow!



Back in the home for Acorn Press Inc

With the close of the ski season in the spring of 1987, Steve returned home from Keystone. Since he was unemployed now, he began to work with us in the family printing business. We were able to provide him with medical insurance, a difficult thing to come by sometimes when you have a pre-existing condition.

It was while all this was going on that Steve began to have pain in all his joints. During his regular clinic visits, tests showed that once again he had developed more than the normal amount of white blood cells in the blood stream and they were apparently causing arthritis.

The condition worsened as time passed. Sometimes Steve's hips and back hurt so badly he could not sit up long enough to eat at the table with the family. We had to serve him meals while he lay on the sofa or in bed. Some days he did not get out of bed at all. This was so unlike Steve, he was always on the move, never could sit still very long! He was put back on prednisone pills but again it was a slow process to clear up the problems.

Steve seemed to be getting depressed by the inactivity pain was forcing him into. However, not being one to complain when he was really in pain, he kept much of his discomfort from us.

In October, Jon Odalen was married and Steve was there in the wedding party as Best Man. We all enjoyed the wedding and the party afterwards was something else. It was held in a restaurant, the whole place reserved just for this party. We ate and sang and danced with the wedding party into the wee hours!

At the age of 19 now, Steve was usually going to clinic appointments by himself and paying all his own medical bills. He had a clinic appointment on Tuesday November 10. I think it was a day he looked the future in the face, perhaps for the first time. He came home from the appointment in a very somber mood. After some time, he came to me and quietly said, "as long as I live I will never get done having medical bills".



The doctors had told Steve that his knee joints were deteriorating so much that he would soon need total knee replacements. It was a real blow to a 19 year old who loved to ski.

My heart was broken for him. I could not deny that my fears for Steve's future were the same as his.

Two days later Steve died. It was Thursday November 12, 1987.