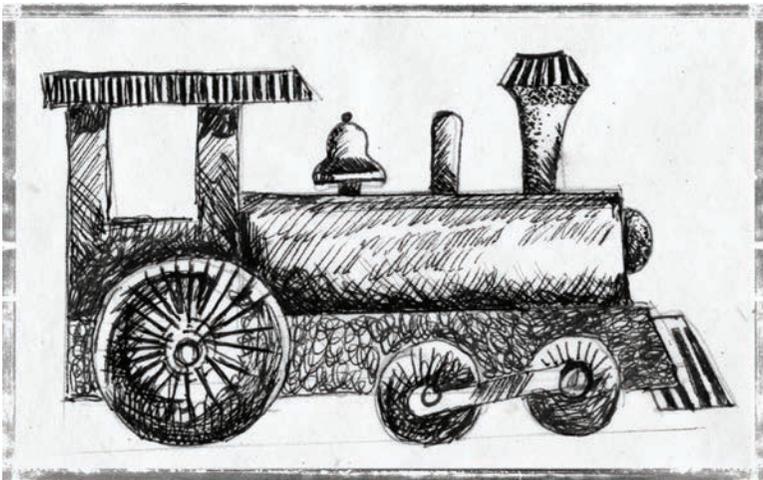


## INTRODUCTION

Miss French was my first-grade teacher who told her class the timeless story of “The Little Engine That Could.” She stood on a chair, moving her arms making choo-choo train sounds saying, “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can.” I felt like the Little Engine (Figure 3). I was so little Mother had to produce my birth certificate to prove I was six years old to be allowed to enroll in the first grade (Figure 4). During my school years, I was constantly told I was too short, not smart enough, can’t spell, can’t write, shouldn’t consider trying to go to college and later, “you can’t make a living as an artist”.



*Figure 3: Little Engine That Could*



*Figure 4: Warren, Bonnie Blue, & Janet  
First Day of School 1948*

Growing up, Father was a wonderful inspiration. He taught me to work hard. His honorable and spiritual life-style inspired me to imitate him. At 18, Dad sent me out into the world as a disciplined, hardworking young man with strong values and a book. When he presented me with the book he said, “Warren, study the book, find the secrets and apply them to your life.” I left home driving a 1949 Chrysler and \$350. After a depressing struggle to start an independent life, I read the book. This book is the foundation of the power of positive thinking.

My book is not about artistic technique. It is a series of flashbacks highlighting peak emotional moments. To tell you about learning to draw would be boring,

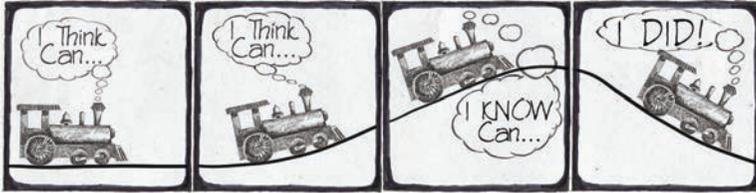
but to tell you why Mother used green paint to obliterate my hand painted mural on the den wall is certainly more interesting. In college, sex and embezzlement sent me down a rabbit hole I managed to escape, only to marry the wrong woman. Years later, I fell in love for the first time, marrying the right woman for love.

Writing this creative non-fiction memoir has been an adventure. I read family letters and browsed through old black and white photos of people I sometimes remember. A few I would rather not recall. To the best of my ability, this is what happened and when. The stories are written first from my experiences and second, so I could perhaps inspire other creative people who want to be successful entrepreneurs. Most of the names have been changed to protect the guilty and the innocent to insure no one will be lawsuit happy.

Your interests may range from business and engineering to the arts. If you have a burning desire to make a living as an independent entrepreneur, please take the risk! Plunge in! When you stumble or fail, do so quickly. You can always begin again with better plans. Continue to refine your work until you reach your goal and succeed.

Happily, like Sinatra's song, I did it "My Way". If I had listened to Mother, friends and counselors, I would have lived an unfulfilled life, including their type of "security" with a gold watch at retirement. For over 40 years, I've not had a boss, nor anyone to score my performance, save myself, my wife (and perhaps my collectors). I never had the fear of a pink slip in an employee mailbox. I am Captain of my life and fate. I work and play each day as I have planned. My passion as an artist is my willingness to explore. I never "do work" in the dull, mechanical sense of the word. I've made mountains of mistakes, lost money, time and a marriage,

yet I keep jumping from one lily pad to another, reaching for the “Golden Ring” of prosperity. I’m not famous, but I’ve lived fully as an artist, earning my living for over 40 years. My art and I have succeeded when everyone said I couldn’t. “I did it my way” creating and selling art. One day I discovered I was living a successful and prosperous life (Figure 5). “I think I can, I think I can,” became, I DID.”



*Figure 5: I think I can, I think I can, I know I can, I DID!*

## A SAVED BOOK

*“The strength of who you are depends upon  
the decisions you make.”*

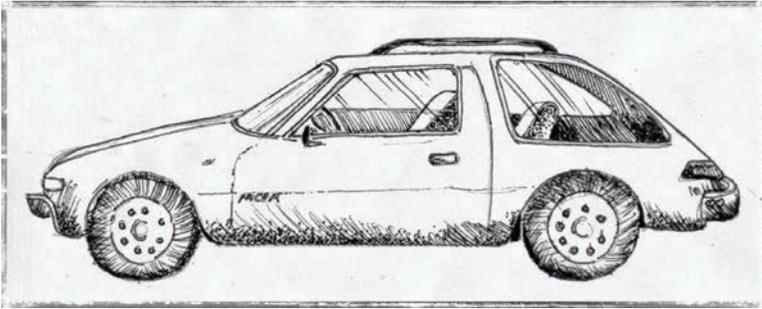
*✿ Dad ✿*

The grocery cart’s metal handle was sizzling hot as I pushed a week’s load of supplies to the car. Unlocking the car, I looked up at the foreboding gray-green clouds in the distance and frowned. I thought I was stepping on chewing gum, but it was the repaired soft spots of the asphalt parking lot on a hell-of-a-hot August afternoon in Austin, Texas. Even with the car windows cracked, we were opening an oven. “Donna you start the car, I’ll unload the cart.” Dumping a bag of ice into our Styrofoam cooler, I unloaded the cold food, grabbed a handful of ice, held it to my neck and slid into the seat. I exclaimed, “Damn! The seat’s hot.” I liked the “glass bubble” and sleek lines of our AMC Pacer (Figure 6), but it was like a greenhouse and made me secretly wish for the massive visor in my old 49 Chrysler.

The humidity was so intense my shirt stuck to me and Donna complained that her bra was soaking wet. She said, “I’m going to drive to that shade.” She parked under the trees at the rear of the shipping dock. The car was starting to

cool. We were quiet, except for the roaring air conditioner.

We were young in 1976, I was 34 years old, Donna was five years younger. She slurped the last of her Coke with only a hint of ice left. I watched her. She was pretty and healthy with long hair tied in a pony-tail. A few wisps of escaped hair were pasted to her forehead from perspiration. I smiled at her. She smiled back and said, "Ready to go?" She eased the car around to the front of the building toward the street.



*Figure 6: AMC Pacer*

I relaxed as the car continued to cool and cleaned my sweat covered glasses. She screamed, "Look," pointing to the horizon. I jerked up to see a dark finger-size rope of clouds, disappearing behind the trees miles away. It took a second to recognize what I was seeing, yelling, "It's a tornado let's get home!" Donna swerved into the merging traffic.

She gripped the steering wheel and glared at the ribbon of asphalt speeding toward us at 60 mph. Glancing up I said, "We're in for a storm." She nodded her head in the direction of a distant, white anvil cloud climbing to the altitude of 40 or 50 thousand feet. Her relaxed expression from sitting in the shade and letting the car cool had changed. I asked, "Are you ok?" She replied, "I just want

to get home.” Rolling down the window, the fresh smell of rain on hot asphalt triggered memories from childhood. I used any excuse to go outside during summer storms to splash in the gutter and collect earth worms.

We were in a tunnel of sunlight with the sky ahead of us growing darker. Watching a line of black ominous clouds rush to cover the sky northeast of our place, we both felt an urgent need to be home. My fingers fumbled with the radio. The reception gave us cursory reports of hail and lightning to the north. At Steward Junction, with only nine miles to go, we turned west. I said loudly, “I think the safest place will be in the new studio, too many windows in the house.” Two months prior, we purchased a 1902 farmhouse and abandoned restaurant near the highway, east of the tiny community of Bertram, Texas. The restaurant, our future studio/gallery, would be our storm shelter.

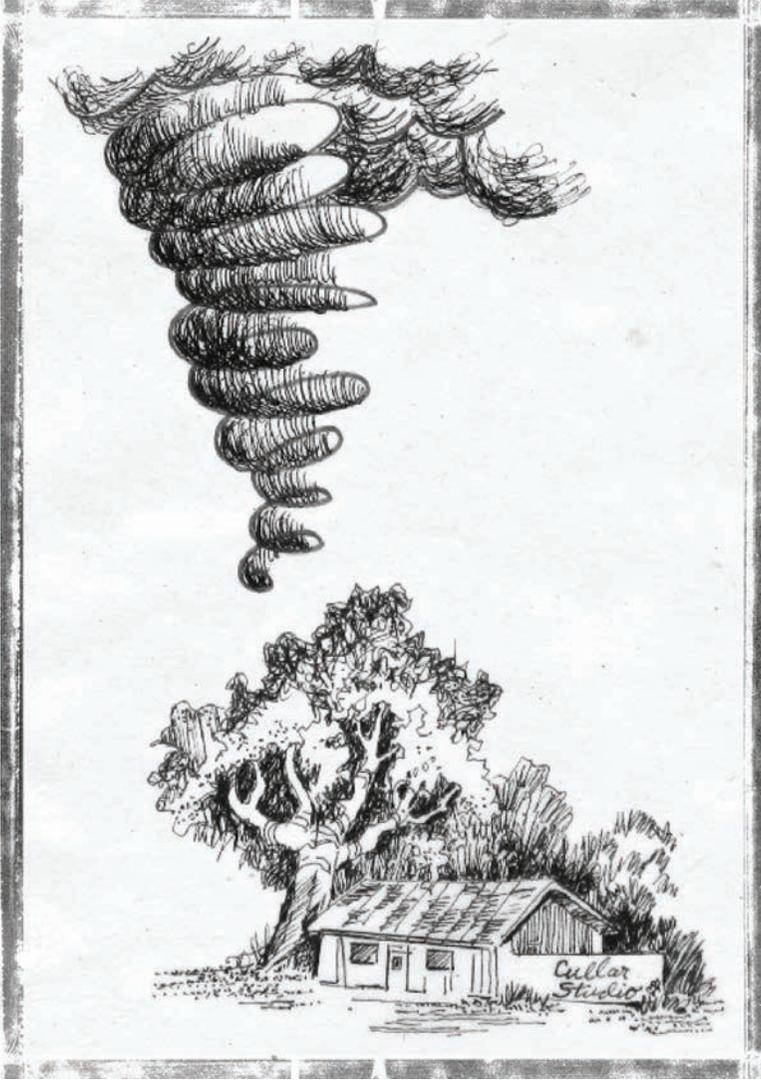
The sky was growing darker. Rain drops the size of fried eggs plopped on our windshield as we pulled into our drive next to the porch. I yelled, “I’ll put the groceries on the porch and you start taking them to the kitchen. I’ll put the car up.” I drove into the garage and made a dash for the porch. The pea size hail pelted me, ping-*ing* as it hit glass or metal. In the hall closet, I pulled out two old Marine Corps jackets, a flashlight and a couple of blankets. I met Donna in the kitchen with hastily made sandwiches, a thermos of water and a pillow. Her wide-eyed expression spoke fear. We went out on the long porch that ran the entire length of the house. I struggled to cover us with a blanket. The wind was loud, I had to yell, “Hold on to my belt.” Donna’s hand grasped my belt. We hugged our provisions and stepped off the porch into the wrath of the storm. The rain was cold and stinging,

coming in sheets at a steep angle. The hundred feet or so to the studio felt like a mile with only the blanket to protect us. We moved like an undulating Chinese Dragon celebrating the New Year, sloshing our way into the studio.

I flipped on the ceiling lights, illuminating the dismal atmosphere of our furniture and still unpacked moving boxes. We dried off and began to organize our storm shelter in the narrow hall-way leading to the bathrooms. I found a box marked camping gear and to my delight, pulled out sleeping bags and spread them in the hall-way. The lights flickered. Stopping and looking at one another, we quickly piled our pillows, flashlight, and thermos of water in our hall shelter. The wind died down, the storm subsided, and the sky was filled with ominous clouds. Only a gash of distant sunlight broke the darkness. The rain retreated to a light sprinkle. Trees that had been arching and bending against the approaching storm were now delicately swaying.

Leaving the hallway, we opened the curtains, moved a few boxes and sat at our wooden picnic table to watch the storm. Donna spread our meager dinner on the paper sack. Two sandwiches, a pack of chips, and a thermos of water never tasted so good. I opened the studio door to a blast of cold air and the freshness of rain. We watched a serpentine silver stream of water run down the center of our driveway. I felt compelled to find where the cloud formations were to the North. Turning to Donna, "I'll be back shortly." She yelled back, "Don't be gone long."

Walking briskly, to see past our big trees, the wet grass quickly soaked my jeans. The experience reminded me as a kid of those neighborhood folks who scurried like mice to hide during storms. The boiling clouds were hanging dangerously low and starting to slowly swirl. I yelled, "Oh,



*Figure 7: Bertrum, Texas, Storm Over Studio, 1976*

Hell!" I turned and ran for the studio. At the same moment, an explosion violently shook the earth causing me to jump straight up, clawing at the air. A terrible sound blasted over

the studio roof. Like fourth of July sparklers, a shower of electric sparks were erupting from the highway transformer. The pungent odor of burning rubber wafted through the air. The lights went out in the studio. A massive gust of wind slammed me in the chest. My heart was beating in my throat. Squinting and covering my face, feeling for the wall, I elbowed my way to the front of the studio (Figure 7).

The grinding sound of metal being torn from the roof of the house was deafening. Blindly, I groped for the studio door handle. The wind sent the aluminum screen door slamming into the side of my head. I managed to push open the jammed wooden door. In that instant, the storm hit the other side of the building, sending me sprawling across the linoleum floor. Shards of broken glass exploded in all directions. The flimsy curtains were flapping horizontally in the wind.

Stunned, I yelled, “Donna, are you alright?” She screamed, “I’m ok!” “Donna, turn on the flashlight.” She yelled back, “It doesn’t work.” With the window gone, rain and hail were pouring in, carried by the screaming wind. The light outside was inky blue, pierced by lightning strikes that illuminated the pitch-black interior of the studio. Our studio was a surreal gothic landscape. Lightning gave me a moment to see where to walk.

I yelled at Donna, “I’ve got to cover the window.” The glass crunched as I moved slowly through the jungle of boxes and furniture. I was confused and terrified while trying to come up with something to cover the hole where the window had been. I found several scraps of plywood but all of them were too small. The antique bookcase to the right of the blown-out window would stop the rain. Positioning my leg against the back wall, using all my strength,

I forced the bookcase into place. Moments later the soggy curtains hung limp as rain ran down the back of the case. My temple was pounding from the screen door. I felt something trickling down my neck and onto my t-shirt. I tasted the end of my finger. Blood! The lightning reflected off of the floor. I bent down, carefully picked up a handful of melting hailstones and held the ice to my bleeding temple.

My treasured books were soaking up the storm. With the next burst of light, I could see the books and quickly stuffed my favorite one under my shirt.

Donna screamed, "Warren!" I yelled back, "I'm on my way!" In the dimness, I navigated through a tangle of debris to the hall. In the blackness Donna, grabbed me yelling hysterically, "I don't want to die, I don't want to die." The staccato pounding from the hail on the metal roof, the screaming wind and lightning, were too much for her. She was losing control. I pulled her down onto the sleeping bags and hugged her tightly. The storm raged on. Time slowed to a crawl. We felt the storm would never end, but eventually it abated. Only a light rain remained; dripping off the roof.

Donna relaxed as I positioned an arm under her head. I rearranged the hastily made pallet making us a little more comfortable. In our dark clenched embrace among bedrolls, quilts and pillow, we whispered like kids playing "fort" under the dining room table. We thanked God to be alive. Exhaustion and warmth eventually took over. My temple had quit bleeding, leaving in its place a throbbing headache. The cocoon of blankets and bedrolls became cramped. When I turned over, Donna said, "What's that sharpness?" I said, "It's a book, the only one I saved from the storm." I pulled it from under my T-shirt and propped the book against the wall. I heard her sleepily mumble,

“Really, must have been special, to have saved that book...”  
I whispered, “That book changed my life.”

*“The value of decisions depends upon the  
courage required to render them. The great  
decisions, which served as the foundation of  
civilization, were reached by assuming great  
risk, which often meant the possibility of  
death.”*

*✧ Mr. Hill ✧*