

Long Island, New York

Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.

William Jennings Bryan

After another interval of a month, Robbie began to wonder when Red Hawk might return. That night Red Hawk came to Robbie, who was very happy to see his new friend.

"Hi, Robbie."

"Hi!"

"How about tonight you tell me where you'd like to go?"

"Really? Anywhere?"

"Sure. What do you think?"

"Well, I guess it would be neat to see how Captain Lewis received the stick. Can we do that?"

"O.K. Let's go to a town called Uniondale, New York—on Long Island. It's March of 1959."

After a long day of meetings with executives of the Long Island Rail Road, Doug Turnbull drove past a small high school on his way to dinner. As he drove, he saw a boy in the dark under a single light, practicing his lacrosse skills on a handball court.

After finishing dinner, Turnbull drove back past the boy who was still working his skills.

The next night, Turnbull drove past again. This time the boy was practicing under the same light in a steady drizzle. Again Turnbull saw him on his return trip.

On the third night, Turnbull's meetings had run much later than the previous days', and he did not expect to see the boy out so late. Yet there he was, pounding away on the wall. Very impressive, the man thought. He decided to stop and watch the boy. The youngster did not notice that Turnbull had parked nearby and begun to walk slowly toward him. As he watched, Turnbull appropriately kept a respectful distance from the boy. He was most intrigued to see the boy 'shadow boxing' an imaginary defender as he practiced his footwork, dodging, and stick position. Though the man had grown up, played, and presently lived in an area famous for its brilliant high school and collegiate lacrosse, Turnbull had never seen these training tactics employed by a youngster.

The boy executed the moves over and over, dodging and shooting. After all six of his balls had slipped away from him, the boy took a break to recover them. Turnbull took the opportunity to approach the boy.

"I've seen you here three nights in a row. Do you come here every night?" Turnbull opened.

"Yes, sir, just about every night if it's not raining," the young Lewis replied.

"It was raining last night."

"Not that hard, sir."

"Please allow me to introduce myself. I am Doug Turnbull."

"My pleasure, sir. I'm Jimmy Lewis."

"Do you go to school here?"

"Yes, sir, right there," Lewis pointed, "Uniondale High School."

"What grade are you in?"

"Ninth."

"Well, Jimmy, I have to say that I'm most impressed with your training regimen. I'm from Baltimore, and we like to think our boys are dedicated to the game. But the work I've seen you do would put them to shame."

Lewis did not know how to respond. Turnbull continued. "So, do they give you homework at Uniondale High School?"

"Yes, sir. I usually go home after practice for dinner, then do my homework for an hour or so, and

come back while it's still light. Sometimes I stay after dark."

Lewis had collected all of his balls.

"Don't let me hold you up. Keep throwing, son," Turnbull offered.

Lewis continued with his drills. Turnbull watched him carefully.

"Did you play lacrosse, sir?"

"Yes, but a long time ago. I haven't played in years."

"What team did you play for?"

"Well, in high school I played at Poly in Baltimore, then Johns Hopkins, then the Mount Washington Club."

Lewis felt a new respect for the visitor, knowing that Hopkins and Mount Washington represented the best the game had to offer. He had never seen either team play, but he imagined that his visitor was a famous player.

"Would you happen to have a game tomorrow?"

"Yes, sir, we do. We're playing Massapequa at 4:30 here at home. Right there on that field. They're pretty good."

"Mind if I come and watch?"

"No. That would be great."

Lewis went home very excited to have met Turnbull, and told his mother that the Hopkins player would come watch him play.

Red Hawk then took Robbie to the game the next day. They saw Turnbull arrive just as the game began.

Turnbull watched Lewis carefully. He knew the boy had something special and could very well be the one he wanted to pass the stick to. Turnbull's presence inspired Lewis to play harder than ever. He scored two goals and had two assists in a winning effort. Turnbull congratulated the boy after the game. "Good job, Jimmy. You did an excellent job. And your team played well."

"Thank you, sir. But I could have done a lot better. I need to figure out why I lose the ball and why it takes so long to pass or shoot it out of the stick. I practice so much, but the stick and I don't seem to work at times. I don't enjoy making mistakes—that's why you saw me at the wall. I know I can figure this game out."

Turnbull was impressed. He had intentionally not made mention of that part of the boy's performance, though he had noted it.

“I think that comes as a natural consequence of your aggressiveness, Jimmy. I really liked how hard you tried to make things happen.”

“Thanks, but I’m still not happy. I’ve tried to work on it, but I’m not really getting any better. I’m working on different ways to carry my stick with one hand so that I won’t lose the ball and also get rid of it quickly, but I just can’t get it to work.”

Turnbull had noticed the unique style and was glad to hear that the boy was consciously attempting it. At that instant, Turnbull realized that this was, in fact, the boy who needed to have the stick. He had clung particularly close to the stick for several years but knew that eventually he’d have to pass it along. It was time. The stick was not a possession, not someone’s property to be passed within one family. It was a tool, and when in the hands of the right person, it would change his life. The stick was not about the past, grieving, or despair. It was about the future, life, and hope. He had only recently allowed himself to seek the next recipient.

Turnbull’s searches of the playgrounds, sandlots, and fields of Baltimore had not produced the results he had hoped for. He had finally found the right person. Jimmy Lewis had the energy, talent, imagination, and work ethic. This boy is

going to make a difference—Turnbull knew it. He smiled within. It felt completely right for the first time. He mocked himself in a whisper, “A Long Islander! I should have known it would happen like this.”

Just then Lewis’s mother approached the boy and gave him a hug, which he only grudgingly acknowledged, shaking loose as quickly as possible before his teammates might see it.

“Mom, this is Mr. Turnbull. He’s the man I met last night, the one from Johns Hopkins.”

“Doug Turnbull, ma’am,” Turnbull offered as he extended his hand. “Your son is a rather remarkable player.”

“Thank you. He loves to play, and so does his brother Johnny. He’s on the varsity. I like lacrosse a lot as well, but it’s not always easy for a mother to watch.”

“I understand. My mother suffered through many, many games my brother and I played.” Turnbull offered with a smile in admiration of his recently-deceased mother.

“What brings you to town, Mr. Turnbull?”

“I work for the railroad in Baltimore. I’m here for some meetings with the people of your Long Island Rail Road. I head back tomorrow. With your

permission, I'd be honored if I could meet Jimmy at his training spot—the handball wall—for a few pointers that have been passed on to me."

"That would be great, sure. Thank you."

"O.K., Jimmy, I'll see you tomorrow then."

"I'll be waiting for you, sir."

After his morning meeting, Turnbull met young Lewis at the handball court to study his mechanics and to provide some refinements to his training program. When Turnbull arrived, Jimmy was already well along with his regimen. Turnbull marveled at the boy's ability and focus.

"So you said that you were trying to work on your vertical stick position?"

"Yes, sir. I've tried to get it to the point where I could use it in a game but it won't work."

Turnbull smiled. "Jimmy, I hope you realize that you are going against the grain. I mean, what you are trying is very different from how we all grew up with the game, and I don't think anyone has approached playing quite like this. Certainly no one in Baltimore has ever seen anything like this before."

"I really wouldn't know, sir. It just seems like the best way to carry and protect my stick and get rid of the ball. I mean, if I can keep the stick away from the defense, they won't really be able to check it."

Turnbull watched as the boy attempted to hold his stick upright, cradle, then shoot. The boy's movements were remarkably good, but still not quite effective.

"Here, let me try for a second," Turnbull asked, accepting Jimmy's stick. "You know, Jimmy, back in the 1930's and '40's my brother Jack was a fantastic attackman. He was the only one I've ever seen who came close to being able to control his stick like you are attempting. He came upon the thought fairly late in his career and was only beginning to perfect it himself. He died in World War II, so I never got to see him master it. He totally dominated the game when he played—one newspaper-man even called him the 'Babe Ruth of Lacrosse'—but he never did completely develop his concepts as he hoped he would."

Turnbull continued, "How long have you been working on this?"

"I don't know. A few months, I guess. My sticks have been difficult to handle. My brother and I even made home-made sticks with a broom handle,

string, cloth, and metal wire—just to see if I could get a better feel and balance. Those didn't really work, but they helped me see where the problems are. So I've tried to modify my sticks. I have been able to get it close but still haven't been able to get it right. It's been frustrating."

Turnbull was amazed by what he was hearing. How could a boy of this age have considered all of these subtle but significant aspects of lacrosse?

"Jimmy, it seems like some patience would be good here. You've certainly taken a good look at this. I have something that might help."

With that, Turnbull produced the leather bag which Robbie recognized immediately—his bag, with the same contents! Robbie and Red Hawk continued to watch.

"Here, try this one," Turnbull offered as he slid the stick out of its bag.

Lewis held the stick in disbelief. He instantly sensed his intimate connection with the stick. He slowly cradled a ball, switched hands back and forth and knew that with this he was about to achieve his goal and vision of how he should play the game. He threw the ball at a mark on the wall, striking it several times in a row. Turnbull detected the boy's

new-found inspiration and felt Jack's presence among them.

"I've never hit the same spot like that—all in a row, Mr. Turnbull," Lewis said excitedly. The boy hit it several more times, and then looked at Turnbull.

"Did you know I would be able to do that with this stick?"

"Well, I had a feeling. Would you like to keep it?"

Lewis was too stunned to accept. "I can't, sir. I mean, why me?"

"Please accept it—you'll learn why later on. Try cradling behind your shoulder."

Lewis tried it for the first time and he felt a perfect balance and fit. He'd been waiting and experimenting for months to attain this feel. He gently rocked the stick back-and-forth. He switched to his left hand with the same perfection. He knew where the ball was without having to make any unnecessary movements or looks at the stick. This was special.

Lewis suddenly froze as a vision entered his mind's eye. The dazed boy reported it to Turnbull. "Wow! I just saw a vision of an old-time player

dodging a defenseman with his stick tucked behind his shoulder."

"Jim, there is a pretty good chance that player was Jack. I told you he had pulled off that move a couple times."

"It looked so natural. Why haven't players been able to do it before?" Lewis asked, as if he had become a master in just a few minutes.

"I have to believe it's been a function of the weight and asymmetry of the stick, Jimmy. Players just haven't been able to control the stick in that position—until now."

The self-confidence that overtook Lewis was intense and immediate. He suddenly felt that he had the instrument that would allow him to reach his potential. He thought that he was no longer bridled by the limitations of every stick he'd used in the past. He was a very good athlete, strong, incredibly quick on his feet and with his hands. All these attributes had been hampered on the lacrosse field whenever he picked up the ball. This would no longer be the case. He hoped to have an opportunity to use the stick in the next game. Lewis and Turnbull spent the next two hours tinkering with the stick. Lewis tried to improve his release and found this stick the smoothest he had ever touched. He switched hands from right to left and left to

right from the vertical position. Balance, efficiency, quick release, the boy thought. This is so smooth. I can do this!

Finally, Turnbull presented the wooden box to Lewis. "Jimmy, these gifts have been passed to me—and now I pass them to you. I believe they'll provide you with insight and wisdom far beyond anything you've ever conceived. Please enjoy them while you have them and then pass them along to another at a time of your choosing. And please render the appropriate respect to these gifts and the game of lacrosse."

Lewis began his walk home, whispering a bit deviously to himself, "I don't think I'll tell Johnny about this just yet. A little more for the sibling rivalry wouldn't be anything new."

Robbie awoke from his sleep with nearly the same sense of destiny as Lewis had acquired in the dream. "This stick is really, really special," he jotted quickly in his journal before he headed to breakfast.