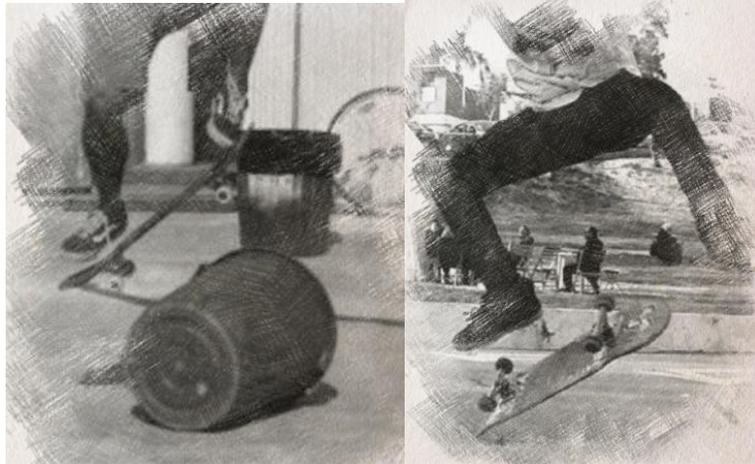


Chapter 15: AWANA Club Night

Chris was excited about going to AWANA again. He had studied his entrance test and had gone through all of it and was ready to finish it that night. Bobby on the other hand, barely remembered what SPARKS stood for.

When they arrived at the church, everyone hung out at the game square until the club started at 6:30. Chris and Bobby brought their skateboards and did some tricks for everyone on the blacktop.

Chris did some ollies over a trashcan and Bobby did some kick flips and 180's and 360's.



They let some of the other guys try to do some tricks, but they mostly just rode them around the circle.

“Rad,” Billy said, “you guys are good!”

“Can I try it?” Debbie asked.

“Sure,” Chris rolled it over to her.

Debbie rode it around the circle a couple times, then squatted down on the board with one foot and put her arms out like she was doing a swan dive.

She almost pulled it off, but the board slipped out from under her and she fell on the blacktop.



The board rolled right over to Mr. Gene as he came into the game square. “You guys shouldn’t bring skateboards to AWANA,” he said picking it up and pushing it off to the side, he continued, “the church will be liable if someone gets hurt.” He looked around at their sad faces, “sorry guys.” Then, he said, “how about we meet at the Jeff Davis parking lot after church on Sunday and we can watch Bobby and Chris do their tricks?” Everyone thought that was a great idea.

“Can I bring my ramp?” Bobby asked.

“How big is it?” he asked.

“About this high,” Bobby gestured about three feet high with his hand.

“As long as I can get it in my truck,” he said, and everyone was excited about that plan, “I’m your game director tonight because Mr. Dave is sick,” he explained, “so, let’s get started.”

“Mr. Gene is cool,” Chris said, and Bobby agreed. “Let’s meet there after church at 1:00pm,” then he blew the whistle really loud to start the club. Everyone got behind their team lines ready to play games. Bobby, Billy, and Junior ran over to their game square and did the same.

The yellow team leader, Mr. Don, told everyone to line up tallest to shortest and stand behind the team line in that order. Davey was first, then Chris was next in line. First game was the sprint relay. All they had to do was run around the circle three times, then in for the pin. Chris looked over at the red team and saw that Bubba was also the second player in line, so he would be running against him. The first guy was taller than Bubba, but he was a little hefty, so he couldn't run that fast.

Davey stood behind the starting line ready to run, then Mr. Gene blew the whistle and off they ran. Everyone was screaming for their team runner. Davey ran hard and on the last go round, he was slightly ahead of everyone. He ran around the team pin and then pushed as hard as he could to slide in

and grab the pin ahead of everyone. He held it up in victory and his team cheered.

“Ten points for the yellow team,” Mr. Gene called out to the scorekeeper, Mr. Steve.

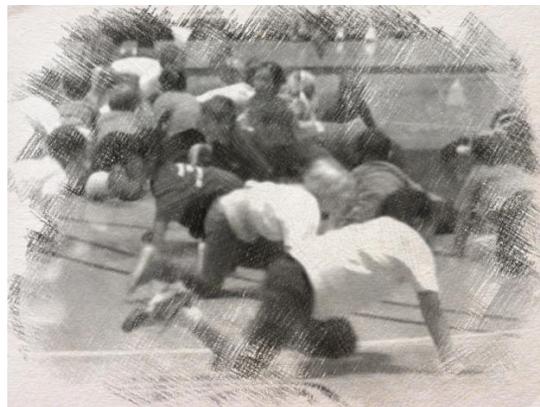
Chris was next, he was ready, the whistle blew, and he was off. Chris and Bubba were neck and neck. Chris could see that Bubba was getting ahead of him, so he put everything he had into it and ran into grab the pin just before Bubba ran in, so Bubba picked up the bean bag for second place.

“Ten points for yellow and five points for red,” Mr. Gene yelled out to the scorekeeper.

Chris went back to his team line and sat down next to Davey. They looked over at the other game square and watched the Sparks play their games.

“What is that game?” Chris asked and laughed as the Sparkies crawled on their knees across the game square to the other side and then collided in the middle with each other.

“That’s the Sparky Crawl,” Davey explained, “it’s an official AWANA Olympics game.”



“What’s AWANA Olympics, anyway?” Chris asked, “Mr. Gene told us about that, but I didn’t really understand.”

“Are you kidding?” Davey said, “it’s awesome! A bunch of churches put teams together and we go to Bethel Temple to compete.”

“What’s Bethel Temple?” Chris asked.

“It’s just another church down the road,” Davey said, “and they have one of the best teams, but we beat them last year. Oh, and there are special games we play in the Olympics, such as that one, and the two we just played.

“So, the Sparks go the Olympics too?” Chris asked.

“Yeah,” Davey continued, “they have their own team and the Chums, Guards, Pals, and Pioneers make up the other team.”

“Sounds cool!” Chris said.

“Yeah,” Davey said, “and you’ll for sure make the team.”

“So, when is it?” Chris asked.

“The team tryouts begin in a few weeks,” Davey explained, “and the Olympics are in January.”

Chris was looking forward to that.

Game time was over, and the boys and girls split up and went into their club rooms. Davey and Chris went to the Pioneers club room.

“Ok boys,” Mr. Tom, their club director announced, “everyone come and sit on the floor in a circle.”

“Who’s ready to say their sections?” he asked, and several boys raised their hands, including Chris.

“Ok,” Mr. Tom said, “you boys go over to the listener table and say your verses.”

“I know two sections,” Davey said, “I gotta say at least two sections a night to finish my second Pioneer book to qualify for Scholarship Camp,” he explained then looked at Chris’ handbook and saw that he had it all filled in. “How many sections are you going to say tonight?” Davey asked.

“All of them,” Chris said.

“What?” Davey said, “all of them? No way.”

“Yeah,” Chris said, “I’ve been practicing all week.”

“Our team is gonna win tonight for sure if you pass all those sections,” Davey said.

Mr. Tom had so many boys ready to say sections, that he had to get more help. “Good to see so many of you are ready to say sections tonight,” he said then got up and said, “hang on, I gotta get us some help.”

He came back in a few minutes with another man Chris hadn’t seen before, who was going to help. He looked at Chris and said, “To you new guys, this is Pastor Bee,” Mr. Gene said, “so he’s gonna help me tonight.”

One by one, they took turns listening to the boys recite their verses. “If you can say it word perfect,” Davey explained to Chris, “you’ll get fifty more points for our team.”

“What are the points for?” Chris asked.

“They add up all the points during the club night from game time and handbook time, and the team with the most points wins for the night and everyone on the team get extra bucks,” Davey explained.

“Bucks?” Chris asked, “we get money?”

“AWANA bucks!” Davey said, “you can use them to buy cool stuff in the AWANA store later.”

“That’s great,” Chris said. So, he was now determined to say his verses word perfect.

“Hi Chris,” Pastor Bee said, “first time at AWANA?”

“Yes sir,” Chris answered, “but I came last week.”

“How do you like it so far?” Pastor Bee asked.

“Fun!” Chris was eager to start reciting his verses.

“Ok,” Pastor Bee said as he took a look at Chris’ book. “Let’s see,” he said as he turned the page and found the first verse that Chris should recite, Romans 5:1, “so, would you like to recite this word perfect?”

“Yes sir,” Chris said still waiting for permission to get started.

“Ok,” he said, “go ahead.”

He recited the verse, “P is for Peace, God’s peace, Romans 5:1, ‘Therefore being justified by faith, we have peach with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.’

“Very good,” Pastor Bee was impressed, “that was word perfect!”

“Can I do the next one?” Chris asked.

“Sure,” Pastor Bee said, waiting for Chris to begin.

Chris finished all the verses word perfect! Pastor Bee asked Chris to excuse him for a minute. He walked over to Mr. Gene, just finished packing up things to go to the church for the Council Time session.

“This young man has said every verse in the entrance book so far, and word perfect!” he continued, “he said he’s ready to say all of them tonight. Ok if I work with him on this and he can come to Council Time when he’s done? I’d hate to

disappoint him, he really wants to finish it so he can get his book and uniform.”

“That’s pretty amazing!” Mr. Gene said. “Of course, and thank you for helping out.”

Pastor Bee thanked him, then walked back to the table where Chris was waiting patiently for him to return.

“Chris,” he said, “I’m going to work with you tonight to help you finish your entrance book,” he explained, “so you can go to Council Time when we’re done ok?”

“Thanks Pastor Bee!” Chris said, and they continued.

About thirty minutes later, Chris finished.

“I have to say Chris,” Pastor Bee remarked, “I’ve never seen such enthusiasm.” He signed off the sections, then counted on to him a ton of AWANA bucks, and Chris was stoked.



“So,” Pastor asked, “you have all the verses memorized, but do you understand what they mean?”

“Sort of,” Chris answered.

“How about John 3:16?” he asked.

“Don’t know that one,” Chris said, “is it in my book.”

“No,” he said, “it’s in the Sparks book,” he explained, “if you had started in AWANA in the Sparks club, you would have learned it.”

Pastor retrieved a new Bible from a shelf and opened it to John 3:16 and read it out loud to him, “John 3:16, ‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but will have everlasting life.’” He looked at Chris, do you know what that means Chris?

“Not really,” Chris admitted.

Pastor Bee opened his Bible to the verse and explained it to him.



“Do you believe that God loves you and He sent His son Jesus to die on the cross for your sins?”

“Sins?” Chris asked, “you mean bad things I do sometimes?”

“Exactly,” Pastor Bee said, “and that he died and was in the grave for three days, then was raised from the dead and is now alive in Heaven?”

“I guess so,” Chris said, “is all that really true?”

“According to the Bible it is,” he said, “would you like to pray with me right now to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?”

“Yes sir,” Chris said.

The pastor smiled, bowed his head and Chris did too, he began praying: *“Dear Lord, thank you for Chris and his eagerness to know you. We pray to you now and know that you are listening as Chris talks to you. Chris, pray after me. Dear Jesus, thank you for dying for me on the cross (Chris repeats), thank you for loving me (Chris repeats), I want to trust you as my Lord and Savior (Chris repeats), and live my life for you (Chris repeats). Please forgive me of my sins (Chris repeats). Help me learn more about you (Chris repeats) and how I should live for you (Chris repeats). In Jesus’ name (Chris repeats). Amen (Chris repeats).”*

Chris opens his eyes and Pastor Bee smiled at him and patted him on the back, “That’s all there is

to it Chris,” he said, “according to the Bible, you are now saved from your sins and are a Believer – a Christian,” he said waiting for Chris to respond.

“Really?” Chris said excitedly, “I’m going to heaven when I die?”

“That’s right,” he said with a smile.

“Do you have a Bible?” he asked Chris.

“No sir,” Chris answered.

Pastor gave him the one he was holding, “it’s yours. Read God’s Word and obey it and you will grow in your walk with the Lord,” he waited to see what Chris would say.

“I can have this?” he said, opening it to look through it. There were even pictures in it. “Thank you.”

“Well,” pastor said as he stood up, “you may go to the Council Time session now, there’s a few minutes remaining,” he pointed to the church building where he should go.

Chris thanked him again, said good-bye and ran over to the church. He came in through the back and found a place to sit as Mr. Gene was talking in the front to the kids.

“So,” Mr. Gene said, “next week don’t forget to wear your swimsuits and bring a towel and change of clothes.”

Chris tapped a boy sitting in front of him and asked, “what’s happening next week?”

“Water night!” he said smiling, “we play all kinds of different water games.”

“Rad!” Chris said then heard Pastor Gene ask everyone to bow their heads to close in prayer.

Everyone began piling out of the church looking for their parents.

Chris ran up to Mr. Gene to show him that he finished his entrance book.

“Great job Chris!” Mr. Gene patted him on his back.

May I have my Explorer book and uniform?

“Of course,” Mr. Gene said, “follow me to the office,”

When they got to the office, Mr. Gene handed him his book and said, “here’s your book, but what we do with the uniforms is present it to the clubber with the Pioneer patch at council time in front of

everyone. Invite your parents if they'd like to see it presented to you next week."

"I will," Chris said, "bye!" and ran off to look for Davey.

"Please don't run in the parking lot children," Ms. Nancy yelled out.

Chris looked for Davey and the others, then he saw them getting into Mr. Bell's car, so he ran over.

"Where were you?" Davey asked, "Our team won tonight, and we got a lot of AWANA bucks!" he said showed Chris the wad.

"I was with Pastor Bee," Chris explained. "He was helping me finish my entrance test. I got a lot of bucks too!" he said and showed them.

“Did you finish?” Davey asked as everyone in the car was listening.

“Yes!” he said, “and I got my first book!”, he showed them.



Then he got excited as he began to tell them what happened. “I prayed with the pastor to accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior,” although he didn’t totally understand what all that meant – yet, “and he gave me my own Bible too,” showing it to them.

“Really?” Davey said.

“That’s great news Chris,” Mr. Bell said as he started up the car.

“What does that mean?” Bobby asked.

“I’ll tell you later,” Chris said.

“How do you feel?” Billy asked.

“I feel fine,” Chris said, “Am I supposed to feel something?”

“Maybe not right away,” Mr. Bell explained, “but you may start feeling different later as time goes on,” he continued, “especially when you start reading your Bible and trying to do what it says to obey God.”

“Oh look!” Chris lifted up his new Bible to show to everyone, “he gave me my very own Bible to keep!”

“I want one,” Junior said, “think they’ll give me one too?”

“You can ask Pastor Bee next week,” Chris said.

“So,” Mr. Bell asked, “is everyone coming back next week?”

“Yeah!” Davey said, “it’s water night!”

“What’s water night?” Bobby asked.

Billy jumped in to explain, “we play lots of games where we get wet!”

“Yeah!” Davey jumped in, “like a water gun fight between the kids and leaders, slip and slide, and head dunker.”

“Sounds fun,” Junior said, and Bobby agreed.

“Yeah,” Chris agreed too, “so we gotta wear our trunks?”

“Yeah,” Davey said and bring water guns too.

As Chris and Bobby were getting out of the car, Mr. Bell asked them if they wanted to go with them to Church on Sunday. Then Davey jumped and said, “Yeah and remember we’re going to Jeff Davis afterwards so you should bring your boards to church, and your ramp Bobby.”

Chris and Bobby got out of the car and ran across the street and ran into the house where mom was in the kitchen, “did you have fun?”

“Yeah,” Chris said.

“And next week there’s gonna be water games!” Bobby announced as dad walked in.

“Yeah,” Chris jumped in, “and we need to bring water guns and our trunks too.”

“I think I saw some at aunt Carla’s, so maybe we can borrow theirs,” mom said, “now you boys go get ready for bed.”

“Can we go to church with the Bells on Sunday?” Chris asked, “Mr Gene is gonna take us to Jeff Davis after church to ride our boards.”

“Yeah and he said I could bring my ramp?” Bobby added.

“Church?” mom said looking at Bob and he just shrugged his shoulders and said, “I guess so.”

The boys thanked them, left their AWANA books on the table, and went off to get ready for bed. Lorene picked up Chris’ entrance booklet and

skimmed through it as dad sat at the table drinking his beer and looking at the paper.

“You don’t have a problem with them going to church?” Lorene asked as she skimmed through Chris’ book he left on the table.

“Why not?” he asked, “they seem like nice enough people.”

“Wow!” mom said, “it looks like he recited all these verses!” she handed it to Bob, then picked up Bobby’s Sparks entrance booklet, which didn’t take her long see what he had done.

“Not too much here,” she said, “looks like he did finish one section.”

“That sounds like Bobby,” Bob said, still scanning Chris’ book, and then put it down.

Later, Lorene went in to check on the kids and Chris was laying in bed looking at a different AWANA book.

“What you got there?” mom asked.

“It’s my first official AWANA Pioneer’s book - Explorer,” Chris said and showed it to her, “I have to finish this one and another one before April to qualify to go to Scholarship Camp this summer,” he explained.

“Wow,” mom said a little surprised, “you’re really getting into this AWANA stuff huh?” she continued, “and I see that you already finished your little book they gave you last week.”

“Yeah,” he said, “that’s just the entrance book you gotta pass to get your *real* book,” he explained

then said, “Mr. Gene is going to present me with my uniform next week in front of everyone and you and dad want to come.”

“That’s great,” she said, “don’t see why we can’t,” she continued, “I wanted check out this club anyways.”

“I prayed with Pastor Bee tonight to accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior,” he said, “and he gave me this Bible,” showing it to her.

Mom was a little surprised and confused about that, “what do you mean?”

Chris opened his Bible to the verse, John 3:16, “He explained this verse to me that if I pray and accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior, I’ll go to heaven.”

“Ok,” mom said still a little confused, but didn’t appear to be worried, but now she definitely wanted to go check out this AWANA program for herself. She said good night then checked in on Bobby and kissed him good night, then went back into the kitchen where Bob was still reading the paper.

“Chris really likes this AWANA program thing,” Lorene said as she sat down and picked up the part of the paper that Bob had already read.

“Yeah,” Bob said, “sounds innocent enough.”

“At least the boys that go to this club seemed to be nice kids,” she said, “and Gene and Nancy also seem to be nice people.”

“Yeah,” Bob said, “I’m usually not much for church stuff,” he continued, “but, if they like it, that’s good.”

Lorene didn’t mention to him in the conversation she had with Chris about this *getting saved* business, because she wasn’t too sure about it herself, “Mr. Gene is going to present Chris with his AWANA uniform next week in front of everyone and Chris asked if we’d go there for that.”

“Guess so,” Bob said, then went back to reading the paper.