

SECOND MAN ON THE MOON

by [Paul Zakrzewski](#)

Forty years after the moonwalk, a reflection on a childhood obsession for fame, a friendship and one more autograph.



11 ASTRONAUT EDWIN E. ALDRIN JR. WALKS ON MO

"For a kid who struggled with a sense of shame, I'm amazed at how shamelessly I pursued some of these guys."

Sometime near the beginning of high school, my best friend spilled the secrets of the first men on the moon. It summed up a good deal about two fourteen-year-olds back on earth. We had started the fall before at one of Southern Ontario's wealthiest public high schools, and we were sitting in its rambling underground cafeteria. Nearby, the cinderblock walls were covered in murals of old rock stars, and

everywhere the tables reeked of ammonia—though that wasn't what caused me to put down my hamburger.

“Did you know that Buzz Aldrin was the first guy to pee on the moon?” said Dave. He'd been showing me a photograph of what turned out to be the fateful moment. There was Aldrin at the end of the module's ladder in a bulky white space suit and fishbowl helmet, about to dip one toe into the Sea of Tranquility. Across the white expanse of the suit, which made him balloonish, like the Michelin Man, he'd signed “Edwin ‘Buzz’ Aldrin” in vivid blue-felt ink. It was Dave's older brother, Tom, who'd gotten him into astronaut autographs. Suddenly Dave was pursuing his quarry with the same surprising vigor and precision he'd brought to Beatles' rarity LPs and *Yellow Submarine* figurines a year before. These days at lunch, Dave spouted off more insider facts than a copy of National Inquirer, U.S. space program edition.

“Did you know that Aldrin was so resentful about being the second man on the moon that he refused to take a single photo of Armstrong?”

“Did you know that Armstrong and Aldrin had only twenty seconds of fuel left when they landed on the moon?”

“Did you know that some thought the moondust on their boots would ignite when it came into contact with oxygen?”

And so on. Dave had dark, good-looking features, which combined with a thick helmet of hair that he didn't need to comb—once in sixth grade, he'd rubbed his head vigorously and a spider had fallen onto his desk—gave him a natural air of authority. Still, in truth, I had a hard time relating to the subject of space exploration. It sounded too close to physics, a class I always seemed to have after lunch, and which caused me to squeeze my hands and bite my cheeks in an effort to pay attention. But Dave's space facts had the type of emotional texture that stuck with you. Particularly the one about Aldrin stopping on the ladder of the lunar module to relieve himself inside his space suit—in front of a billion people watching back on

earth. It was just like Dave to dig up an esoteric and off-color nugget like this, something we could both appreciate, like the way we had both loved the dark comedy of *American Werewolf in London*.

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The year was 1982, and the last men to walk on the moon had completed their mission a decade before; it was a time long ago, in a galaxy that felt far, far away. Each night my father caught the 6:30 broadcast news, and I can still recall where I was when key events flashed across the screen—the shootings of the U.S. president and the Pope, the Falklands War, even the inaugural launch of the space shuttle *Columbia* the year before. But it was hard to imagine how any of these things related to the lives of the people I knew in the leafy, lakeside bubble of Oakville, Ontario. Yes, some trends blew through town as if carried on strong gusts of wind—Rubik’s Cube and *Space Invaders*, the Thompson Twins and the Preppy Look. But a lot of the culture we grew up with was rattling around from the previous decade, like the pucks in air hockey games. It was like the floor-to-ceiling murals in the cafeteria—Marc Bolan, complete with gaunt cheekbones and his trademark hat; or Jim Morrison, with his feral, impossibly-wide face. Why were we surrounded by heroes from the decade before?

During the work week, the fathers of kids at my school took the hour-long ride aboard the Go Train, which deposited them, like freshly minted coins, into the scrubbed glass office towers of Toronto’s Bay Street. Mothers stayed at home. Already in ninth grade, many kids in my class spent their weekends breaking open hidden “two-fours” of Molson Export and converging on empty homes. Once upon a time, the rich had built their summer homes in Oakville, and judging by the number of estates that still graced the shore of Lake Ontario, their stardust was still floating around town.

Something I couldn’t name—was it the stardust?—seemed to dampen their curiosity about the greater world.

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Dave's house was nearly always empty. He lived with his mother and older brother Tom in a tiny bungalow adjacent to my neighborhood, but in an area where the houses were smaller and closer together. Dave's mom worked in town as a secretary and was rarely home early on weekdays. I had no idea what had happened to Dave's dad; he wasn't mentioned and I never thought to ask. Instead, it was Tom who exerted the biggest gravitational pull on my friend, and you could tell where Dave was going by where Tom had been. In all honesty, I was a bit intimidated by Tom because Dave had once passed along his threat, perhaps uttered in jest, that I'd better stay the hell away from his stuff or else. But as it turned out I had little to fear. Like the rest of Dave's family, he was never around. There were only his traces, spread around the cramped basement like the remnants of an ancient civilization, a pop culture Troy: the drum kit and the Union Jack and the book case of science fiction and the *Yellow Submarine* Beatles' figurines.

It was in that basement that I first got caught up with the astronauts. A few months earlier, one freakishly warm day over the Christmas break, Dave and I were hanging out when we heard the thud of the mailman's delivery. In a moment, Dave had disappeared up the stairs. He had a stocky build, or "husky" as my mother liked to call it, and yet for a big kid he moved with considerable grace. When he returned he was carrying a large manila envelope, emblazoned with a NASA seal. It was the first time I'd seen this logo, though I was to become very familiar with all its permutations. As Dave ran an X-acto knife along the sealed edge, I felt gripped by a sense of anticipation I wasn't expecting.

"Cool, eh?" Dave said as he slid the photo out of the envelope and rested it on his palm.

"Man!" I heard myself say.

This wasn't any pretty but nebulous image of a galaxy, the sort of thing that might make a screen saver today. It featured an enormous slice of the moon, so close you could see a hundred shades of gray.

Above it, like a beauty mark in the surrounding blackness of space, hung the tiny blue-and-white home planet. The photo managed to look ominous, elemental, and beautiful all at once. Moreover, by foregrounding the moon, it had reversed the normal way I thought about space.

This thought was quickly pushed aside by the autograph that appeared across the lunar surface, disappearing here and there into the darkness of the craters. John Young, the signer, was from Dave's description a hard-working old-timer, a real astronaut's astronaut, the sort of guy that few outside the business had heard much about until he had captained the inaugural launch of the space shuttle Columbia the year before. He was also not someone who liked to sign autographs. Around the time of the launch, I couldn't open a Globe and Mail without seeing another story about Young, or his co-pilot Bob Crippen. I'd caught the shuttle's landing, and found myself mesmerized by the spectacle. I liked the way the craft hovered in the shimmering desert air, its swollen body as improbable in flight as a bumblebee's.

I studied the photo for a few more moments. The loops of the signature looked a bit shaky, like they'd been written by an old person.

The signature was a fake, autopen.

With its spindly metal fingers and its memory bank of stored autographs, the autopen was like a contraption cooked up in the lab of a crazed scientist. Except it was invented by some intersection of big business and big entertainment to thwart collectors. The U.S. president, the Canadian prime minister, the Queen of England—they all used autopens. As did movie stars and, apparently, astronauts. The hesitancy in the line often made autopen signatures easy to spot; which made the let-down after finding one all the more immediate.

But Dave didn't let it get to him that day. Instead, he pulled out a binder filled with photos, all in plastic sleeves. All had been signed, many of them inscribed to Dave.

“Most of these are from NASA,” he said, “and they’re not autopen.”

“Are real ones easy to get?”

“So easy you should try it.”

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"I added a large drop-cap to the first sentence, and wreathed the edges with the metallic pencils, shading so heavily that when I squinted it looked just like gold leaf."

In those days, everything worthwhile happened in basements. It was in the next door neighbor's basement, with its red wall-to-wall shag carpet, that a girl once gently kissed my elbow after I had nervously turned my face away during a game of spin the bottle. And it was in my own, which my mom had proudly “modernized” by hanging orange burlap wallpaper and placing a stocked bar we never used, where I practiced my own hobbies. For a time, I wanted to perfect a recipe for fake blood after reading about Dick Smith, Hollywood's great makeup artist. A little after this, I lugged to the basement an electric Brother typewriter bought with bar mitzvah money, on which

I typed out vampire and detective stories. It was in our basement that I discovered my mom's old copies of Henry Miller, which I mostly scanned for the dirty parts. Like Chief Broom descending into the bowels of the psych ward in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a book I studied that year, I needed to go underground to find the things that would lead me out of Oakville, to become the person I was to be.

But who exactly was this? Since I was fourteen, this wasn't really an occupational much less metaphysical question. A detective, I figured, or maybe an archeologist. A couple of years earlier I had enrolled in a children's archeology class held Saturday mornings in the basement of the public library. The instructor was muscular and easy-going, a scientist from the Royal Ontario Museum. He sported short sleeves and gold-rimmed glasses, balancing the breezy and the scientific even before Indiana Jones had hit the screen. To help us learn about the different ancient civilizations he showed us documentaries on how Heinrich Schliemann's close reading of the Iliad had helped him to discover Troy; and how Howard Carter's dogged nature led him past curses to finish the work on Tutankhamen's tomb. It didn't take much imagination to connect to these thrilling stories as I felt the heft of the pottery shards and ancient coins in my hands.

From there it wasn't much of a leap to autographs. Like the ancient artifacts, autographs linked you to history, but then added an entire new level of connection: the fact the signer had touched the very artifact you now held. But there was something else: the way that the autographs were a mirror, a direct expression of who that person was in the world.

More than anything, I wanted to be famous. After those archeology classes, I started signing every surface I could get my hands on: books, newspapers, my class year photographs. Class photos and yearbooks were especially susceptible. My classroom photo from seventh grade had so many signatures on it that it obscured everything but my face. Nothing was more gratifying than signing my name. It felt like an essential declaration of personhood: here I am. For me, fame seemed like a kind of armor, a bulky suit, a

guarantee that you'd be loved and respected for who you were no matter what.

At the time, I still smarted from an incident that had occurred back in seventh grade. It was the end of a class in which we'd been studying the Egyptians. The teacher, knowing my interest in the subject, had asked me about the Tutankhamen exhibit, which my parents had just taken me to see. I regaled everyone with my favorite parts of the exhibit, enjoying the feeling of holding forth, and in my excitement losing track of time. Which made the looks of boredom and anger on my classmates' faces all the more shocking. I looked at the clock on the wall and realized, with a growing sense of shame, that I'd kept them several minutes past the bell. Worse, the teacher had thanked me for a fascinating talk. In my excitement, I'd opened myself up to my classmates—and they were quick to judge me for it. Now, in high school, I'd come into my own in English class, discovering a knack for deciphering themes and symbols. But every time I put up my hand it was as if I was sticking it into a deep and dangerous hole, as if I were walking off a plank. I had to summon up the strength to get past my own sense of dread that I might once again expose myself to the ridicule and judgment of my classmates.

Dave didn't care what anyone thought of him. One time when we were bicycling the two miles to the public library in the rain, an old lady driving past us sent a puddle of water spraying in our direction. Before I had even wiped my eyes, Dave had sped off in pursuit. I caught up with him several blocks away.

“So what did you do?”

“I told her to roll down her window and then I chewed her out,” he said, his cheeks still red from the exertion or the confrontation or both.

“But she was an old lady and didn't mean it!”

“Fucking grandma shouldn't be driving.”

Dave always stuck up for himself, even when he was wrong. For a time he had delivered the local newspaper to a set of apartment buildings downtown. He'd taken to ditching the papers from time to time, which earned him the ire of customers at one particular building. To them, he left a token of appreciation—he took to pissing in their stairwell when completing his route. I didn't admire that behavior, but I liked the self-confidence behind it. Sticking up for yourself is partly about the willingness to be yourself—to make a scene, to let people see you as you are, no matter what.

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I quickly saw that Dave was right: receiving authentic autographs was easy. After school, we'd bike to the public library and look up the addresses we needed in the most recent volumes of Who's Who. I began with the names that Dave had already collected —surprisingly enough, these included astronauts I'd actually heard of, like John Glenn, Neil Armstrong, and Buzz Aldrin. Most of these men had long since retired from the space program; some were airline executives, others had gone into government or advocacy work, and a couple of them—not surprisingly, moonwalkers—had given over their lives to Jesus Christ. Along with my requested autographs, they sent me pamphlets about the work they did in His name, and tended to sign things with several exclamation points, perhaps reflecting their extra fervor.

I looked forward to Mondays the most: there was no Saturday mail delivery in Ontario, as there was in the U.S. That gave me an extra day's worth of backlog to hope for. I learned from Dave that I could get astronauts to sign a lot more than just the standard NASA photos. Among the most valuable collectibles were the autographed photos of the entire Apollo space crews, especially those that carried the moonwalkers. There were ten Apollo missions after the fateful Apollo 1 fire. Thanks to the Apollo 13 debacle, only six ever went to the moon. Each mission carried three men—the two who descended in the lunar module, plus the one to pilot the orbiting capsule. But people got astronauts to sign all sorts of items: cue-cards, first-day

stamp covers, magazines, even NASA missions reports, such as the ones that Dave had discovered and subsequently lifted from the school's vertical file collection.

A few weeks after he'd received the fake John Young, Dave met me in front of the school library during a free period we shared. He'd decided that the school librarian, Miss MacDonald, was gunning for him, and he never lost an opportunity to cut her up behind her back.

"Heil Hitler," Dave muttered under his breath as we passed the circulation desk.

I grinned stupidly, and secretly hoped she hadn't heard us. But Miss MacDonald clearly had bigger problems to worry about, as I discovered a few minutes later. When Dave found me at the study carrel I was seated at, he was lugging a pair of massive black volumes. He plopped these on top of my notebook: old issues of TIME and LIFE magazines.

"Check it out," he said. With a mischievous grin he pulled out an X-Acto knife from inside his denim jacket.

We took turns flipping through each volume until we came across the stories on the space program. On this page a photo of a Mercury rocket piercing the perfect blue skies above Cape Canaveral, on that the impressive, nearly biblical column of orange flame bursting out of an Apollo rocket. But in between these was another story I'd never really thought about. Photos of young American men, maybe Tom's age, wading through rivers and forests and muck and brush. They stared at the camera beleaguered and defiant, their helmet straps loose and cigarettes drooping.

"Crap," said Dave. I thought for a moment that Miss MacDonald, who made a habit of breaking up chatter in the study carrels, had spotted Dave hovering over mine. But Dave was sliding his thumb along the inner edge of his volume, at a page where the cover should've been. He cracked the spine wider and shoved it under my nose. Someone else's X-Acto knife had gotten there first.

Tom's.

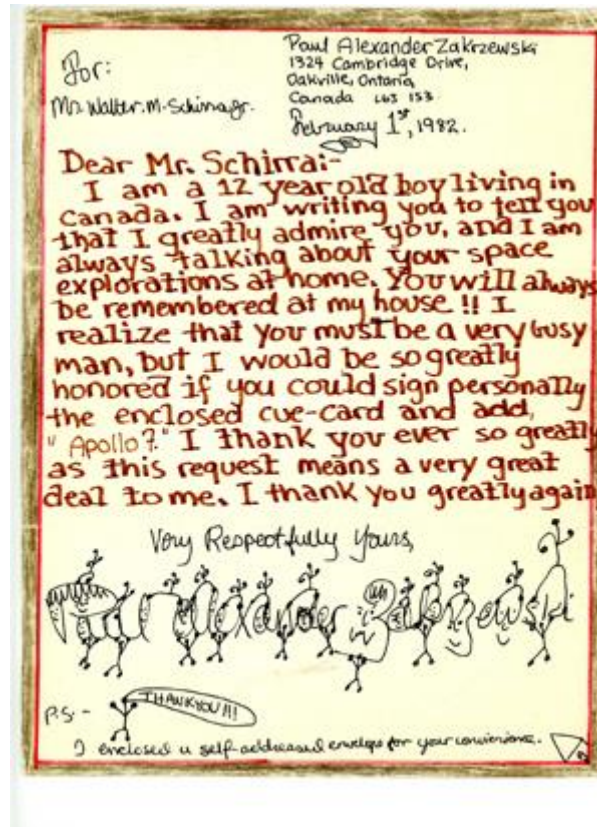
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Within a few weeks I had arrived at a system that kept me from focusing too hard on the autopens, one that sometimes resembled more of a natural force—like the “How Rain Works” poster that used to hang in my science class—than a hobby. I'd type up mission lists and select astronauts, acquire photos, send out requests, then record the signed items on 3-by-5 index cards I kept carefully stored away. At the beginning I got my fair share of fakes and autopens, but after a month or two focused more on the retired astronauts, who often promptly replied. Not that I didn't go after the famous names—John Glenn, Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, as well as the more challenging cases, like Alan Shepherd Jr. and John Young. For a kid who struggled with a sense of shame, I'm amazed at how shamelessly I pursued some of these guys. I wrote to one astronaut in particular, a moonwalker, who never said no and who ended up sending me eight or nine items, including a handwritten letter in which he described his trip to the moon. Eventually, I decided use my dad's name when I wrote to him, and had the items mailed to my grandmother's Toronto address.

But something more elaborate would be needed to land the hard cases. I looked at the letters I was sending out—simple, folded notes typed on the Brother in the basement. Blotches of Wite-Out filled many of them. (When Herman Wouk returned an excerpt I'd typed out from one of his books, he added next to his autograph “I'm not responsible for these errors.” He was being funny, but I took the point to heart). First, I drafted the best letter I could think of:

Dear Mr. Young, I am a 14-year-old boy living in Canada. I am writing to tell you that I greatly admire you, and I am always talking about your space explorations at home. You will always be remembered at my house!! I realize that you must be a very busy man, but I would be so greatly honored if you could personally sign this enclosed photograph of the space shuttle Columbia. I thank you

ever so greatly as this request means a great deal to me. Very respectfully yours....



"Maybe I'd stretched the truth a bit in that second line, but I felt it was important to stroke the astronaut's ego."

I reviewed what I'd written. Maybe I'd stretched the truth a bit in that second line, but I felt it was important to stroke the astronaut's ego. Still, the letter needed something else. John Young probably got dozens of letters like these every week. I would have to do better. I crossed out my real age and wrote in "12". I bought several calligraphy pens, the ones that had been all the rage back in seventh grade, along with some colored pencils and a stack of fake parchment paper. With these, I painstakingly recopied the letter onto the parchment with the calligraphic pens, adding the appropriate flourishes and curlicues. I added a large drop-cap to the first sentence, and wreathed the edges with the metallic pencils, shading so heavily that when I squinted it looked just like gold leaf. When it came time to sign the letter I used my middle name as well, the

entire autograph taking up the full width of the parchment. Inspired by the example of George Cruickshank, the nineteenth-century illustrator, I added dozens of whimsical stick figures dangling and sitting on the loops of his name.

I wonder if I've ever been quite as focused—or consumed—as I was when I was collecting astronaut autographs. If the “magnificent desolation” of the moon had sparked a latent religiosity in some of these men, their autographs opened up something similar in me. The photos and letters and first-day stamped covers were gorgeous artifacts, as jewel-encrusted as a Byzantine icon, as awe-inspiring as a holy reliquary. Even the occasional autopen or secretary-forged autograph made sense when viewed as part of a spiritual awakening: it was a matter of faith that a real autograph would be just around the corner. The photo from one astronaut in particular stands out from this time, a color image of the link up of two Gemini crafts high above the earth. The photo had been printed on glossy paper, and the colors popped off the page: the luminous gold foil of the spacecraft, crinkly as a candybar's, the brilliant blue of the Earth hundreds of miles below. I hadn't sent the photo to be signed—it had been the astronaut's idea to send it to me. More than most, this photo felt special to me, a direct link to a historic event entrusted to me by the very man who was there.

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Dave's lessons were rubbing off on me. One Saturday halfway through winter I convinced my parents to leave me for an hour at Toronto's central reference library while they took my grandmother shopping. I'd never been in the city alone before, and I felt flooded with a sense of possibility as soon as the car pulled away. I had never before been inside a building like this; where you could look up in the atrium and see all six floors of at once. Fifteen minutes later I'd found the vertical files section and had pulled four folders all labeled “Space Program, U.S.” Three of them were filled with old mission reports and newspaper clippings, boring stuff, but in the fourth I struck gold. A set of glossy black-and-white press photos from the

early 1960s, each with a different Mercury astronaut. Scott Carpenter, Gus Grissom, John Glenn. The images were exceedingly crisp; and the caption on the back of each had been printed on mimeograph paper. Even more than the issues of LIFE magazine, these photos felt like some direct line to the men, and it didn't take much effort to imagine their autographs emblazoned across the glossy surfaces.

Which may help to account for how and why I stuck them into the middle of a notebook without a moment's thought. My heart was already beating fast, but I knew what I had to do. I knew all about the magnetized strips inserted into books—I'd seen Dave remove these before he swiped things from the school library. But libraries couldn't magnetize photos, could they? As I neared the pair of detectors at the end of the check-out line, I realized I was holding my breath..

It was a good thing I'd spent all my time worrying about the detectors. When they did not sound, I felt flooded with relief, and didn't have much time to worry about the security guard, a large Sikh man in a neatly wrapped turban, posted just past the exit.

"Check your bag, please?" the guard said. I was so aware of the fact that my heart had jumped into my throat that I didn't really take in the way he rifled through my book bag and handed it back to me just as quickly, resuming his bored expression.

My parents were waiting at the curb. I jumped in the back seat and held the back pack on my knees. It was only twenty minutes later, as the car merged onto the Queen Elizabeth Way, that I dared to look at my stash of photos. Behind me, the CN Tower and the rest of downtown receded safely from view.

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Not long afterward, in March, I came home from school to discover a large white envelope with the NASA logo. When I slid the photo past its cardboard backing, the first thing my eye fell on was the

inscription, written in blockish caps: “To Paul Zakrzewski/With All Best Wishes/John Young/STS-1.” The autograph contrasted vividly against the photo, an official crew shot of the space shuttle astronauts in their orange space suits—noticeably less bulky than their old Apollo counterparts. It was only after reading Young’s inscription a couple of times that I registered that Bob Crippen had signed the photograph too. It was a small but energetic autograph; certainly not an autopen.

The next day at lunch Dave examined the photo without saying a word. Over the past months he’d written a couple more times to Young, only to get back the same autopen autograph over and over.

“Cool, eh?” I said. At least one of us had managed to crack the notorious John Young.

He clenched his jaw and for a moment I wondered if he was going to tear up my photo; instead he slid it back in its envelope and sent it sailing back down the table.

“Thanks,” I said, shooting him a sarcastic look. “Jealous much?”

He ignored me. “Hey, Zacko, buy me a hamburger,” he said. Dave hardly ever ate at school anymore; he was always biking home for lunch and to check on the mailbox. I fished in my pocket for a couple of crumpled bills and wondered why he couldn’t be happy for me.

“How about a Coke?” he said. He pocketed the money. “Oh, and a cherry pie while you’re at it.”

“You’re a real fucking jerk, aren’t you?” I said, feeling the color rise in my cheeks.

The next morning, when I arrived at the locker we shared that year, I could see that several books Dave never took home were missing. He had been there already and left. Half an hour later I saw him sitting with his back to me in our homeroom class. Not once throughout the class did he turn around to look at me; and he made a point of

swiveling to keep his back to me when I went up to talk with the teacher. I wasn't surprised, then, when he never showed up at the cafeteria during lunch hour. Over the next week, I thought he might say something, even get angry, but when I started to talk to him one morning at the locker he ignored me. At first, I didn't know what to do, and gave into his silence. After a couple of weeks of this, I'd had enough. What had I done that was so terrible? Why was Dave holding such a grudge?

As a pretext for conversation I asked him for my \$1.75 back one morning, but he simply gathered his great dark brows and shot me a look of disgust. It went on like this for weeks. It was a strange existence: without Dave's company, I felt suddenly unmoored in high school, found myself making new overtures to old friends. Mornings I'd come to the locker only to discover a stolen copy of LIFE stuck in the bottom of our locker; I didn't even need to flip through it to know that some of its pages would be missing. On occasion one of us would pass the other in the hallways, and in those moments, I always felt a knot tightening in my stomach—it made me nervous to know he was angry at me—and also something else, a lurch in my chest, that filled me for the first time in my life with real sorrow. Strangely, we continued to share a locker through the end of the year, so I felt always on the brink of knowing something about Dave—it was like I stood on the edge of his life, looking in. After school let out in June my family left for a month's trip to Israel and Greece. It had been three months since our fight, though it felt like three years. The more time went by, the more certain I became Dave and I would never talk again.

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"I wonder if I've ever been quite as focused—or consumed—as I was when I was collecting astronaut autographs.

It turned out I had underestimated my friend. When we got back home at the end of July, I found a small envelope waiting in our mailbox. Inside it held \$1.75 in quarters, and both sides were covered with autographs. On the front, in bold letters like a mock newspaper headline it read: "Men Walk on Moon...Collect Lunar Samples." On the back were nearly a dozen autographs, all adeptly faked, each one an allusion to an inside joke—moonwalker Alan B. Shepherd's irritability, Brian Wilson's acid habit, John Lennon's endless peacenik work, and so on. The personalities with really bad handwriting were appropriately hard to read, while Adolf Hitler's signature was attributed to poor Miss MacDonald.

The entire envelope wasn't just a record of our friendship, but a bid to restore it. Interestingly, though, along the inside of the envelope, like a secret message the Beatles used to sneak onto the inside grooves of the LP rarities he collected, Dave had included the last words of our fight: "You're a real fucking jerk, aren't you? –Paul Zakrzewski." Was it intended as a rebuke for my part in our fight? Or as some kind of acknowledgment of his mistake, an apology? Perhaps it was both. In the end, it was his actions that counted. I had felt badly about our friendship all spring, but my fear of putting myself out there, of making myself vulnerable, had kept me from trying to win it back. Instead, I had left it to Dave to do that.

Throughout our friendship, I had left it to Dave to take the first step. Perhaps that's why the story about Buzz Aldrin had resonated with me. As Aldrin was about to walk on the moon—as he saw the endless dunes of gray powder that lay in every direction, and tried to grasp the enormous black dome of space above him—he gave into the pressure building on his bladder. In front of the billion people who'd tuned in to watch the lunar landing back on earth. I had liked the way Dave told me the story—he had been clearly moved by it, beautiful though personal as it was. But I was embarrassed to hear it because I couldn't imagine allowing myself to be vulnerable in quite this way. I would've been too scared to be seen and judged. But Dave was like Buzz Aldrin, willing to be seen, to experiment and fail; and for a time our hobby had allowed me a chance to experiment and fail too. What I hadn't understood was that Dave was like the second man on the moon because he didn't have much of a choice in the matter. He'd had to make choices before most of the kids in my high school did; certainly long before I'd had to. It would take years and difficult lessons before I would get to the same place.

I called him the day I picked up the envelope, and our friendship picked up almost where we'd left off. There were more trips to the public library and more autographs to compare. Sometime that year Dave had gotten into The Who, and talked me into seeing their “goodbye tour” in Toronto in the fall. And yet, somehow, by the following spring we'd slowly started to drift apart. There was no one defining rupture, just a mutually acknowledged sense that we had started to go in different directions. I was still interested in the astronauts, and had talked another friend into the hobby; Dave's brother had joined a Punk band called Hype and Dave started wearing a black leather motorcycle jacket. By the spring of 1983 he never came to lunch anymore—he'd started cutting school—and when he did he liked reciting the lyrics to “City Baby Attacked By Rats” by the English punk group GBH. I understood the desire to shock, but mostly I just felt put off. He showed up to English stoned, once scoring a 1 out of 100 on a test. The teacher made a wry remark as he passed Dave's empty desk. Not that he'd abandoned all his hobbies; he'd just become more of a purist about them. His brother

had gotten him into Civil War re-enacting. He spent hundreds of dollars on his carefully replicated uniform and musket, and during weekend recreations in Virginia and Pennsylvania he only ate hard tack, as the original Confederates had. A year after the Who concert, I wrote about him for the town newspaper. The newspaper sent a photographer who took his time setting up his equipment in our basement, posing Dave in his uniform and staring down the barrel of his musket rifle. Not long ago, I took out this story and stared at the photograph. For a moment, I wondered if the rifle hadn't been pointed at me.