

ONE

**“I MADE MY MOST IMPORTANT DISCOVERY
WHEN I WAS SEVEN . . . ”**

I was born October 8, 1943, in Columbus, Ohio. My parents called me Robert Lawrence Stine (now you know what the R.L. stands for). One of my earliest memories is a scary one. It's about Whitey.

Whitey was our dog. In pictures, Whitey looks like he was half husky, half collie, and half elephant. He was so big that when we allowed him in the house, he knocked over vases—and the tables they were on! That's why we kept him in the garage.

When I was four, it was my job to let Whitey out of the garage every morning. As soon as I stepped outside, I could hear him scratching at the inside of the garage door.

Slowly, I'd push up the heavy door. And Whitey would come charging out at me. His tail would wag furiously and he would bark like crazy. He was so glad to see me!

Barking and crying, he would leap on me—and knock me to the driveway. Every morning!

“Down, Whitey! Down!” I begged.

THUD! I was down on the driveway.

THUD! Every morning.

Whitey was a good dog. But I think he helped give me my scary view of life. I wonder if I would have become a horror writer if I didn't start every morning when I was four flat on my back on the driveway!

I grew up in the town of Bexley. Bexley is a suburb of Columbus, and Columbus is right in the middle of Ohio.

When I was little, we lived in a three-story house. We had a big yard with a lot of shade trees.

My brother, Bill, is three years younger than me. He and I shared a bedroom on the second floor. The third floor was an attic. It was strictly forbidden. Mom told us never to go up there.

I asked her why. She only shook her head and said, “Don't ask.”

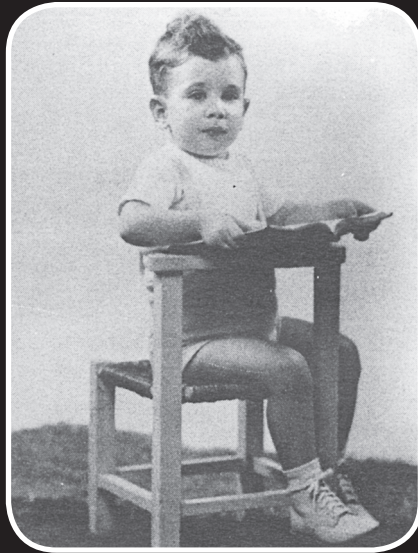
That attic from my childhood is also one of the reasons why I write *Goosebumps* and *Fear Street* today.

I used to lie in my bed at night and stare at the ceiling. *What terrible thing is up there in the attic?* I wondered. I pretended I could see through the plaster. Of course I couldn't see anything. Except plaster. But my imagination sure could.

In my imagination, a coatrack stood at the top of the attic stairs. Next to it, a three-legged table, several cardboard cartons, and an old windup



*"TWO WEEKS OLD, WITH MY MOM.
I'M THE ONE WEARING THE DRESS."*



***"LOOK AT ME. ONE YEAR OLD AND WAY
MORE HAIR THAN I HAVE NOW!"***

record player. That dark shape back in the corner was a mysterious old trunk. Oh, and there was a dusty moose head. I could see this stuff as clear as day. But it was only furniture. It wasn't scary.

The scary part was the monster in the attic. I made it up. And I made up stories about the monster with trunks and moose heads. These stories

seem silly to me now, but at the time they were the best answer I could come up with to the question, *What's in the attic?*

I knew it had to be something truly awful. Otherwise my mom wouldn't make such a big deal about it.

So I didn't go up to the attic. Not right away.

This doesn't mean I had a weird, haunted childhood. I didn't.

My family was a typical family. Dad worked for a restaurant supply company, and Mom was a housewife. We didn't have much money. But my parents worked hard to make sure we never felt poor. There were three of us kids—me, Bill, and my sister, Pam, who came along when I was seven.

My favorite activity as a kid?

Listening to the radio. Believe it or not, we didn't get a TV until I was nine. So I spent hours and hours listening to the radio.

When I was a kid, radio wasn't just music and talk shows. There were wonderful stories, mysteries, comedies, and westerns on the radio every night. I would listen to such exciting shows as *The Lone Ranger*, *The Shadow*, *The Whistler*, and *Gang Busters*.

There was one show that *terrified* me. It was called *Suspense*. I still remember how scary it was.

In the beginning of the show, a long gong would chime. And then a very creepy announcer with a



***"MY FIRST HOUSE HAD A BIG YARD WITH A BUILT-IN
BARBECUE, A FISH POND, AND A BIRDBATH."***

deep voice would say: “And now . . . tales . . . calculated . . . to keep you in . . . SUSPENSE!” His voice was so terrifying, it gave me chills. And I’d reach out and click off the radio before the scary story would come on.

I never heard one story. I was too scared.

I still remember that creepy voice. Today, I try to make my books as scary as that announcer’s voice on the *Suspense* radio show.

I had a big, powerful radio that could pull in radio stations from all over. As I became older, my favorite stations were in New York City.

One New York station had a man named Jean Shepherd on the air every night. Shepherd was a wonderful storyteller. He’s the guy who wrote the movie *A Christmas Story*. I like the scene where the kid gets his tongue frozen to a flagpole. If you see the movie, that’s Jean Shepherd narrating it, too.

Shepherd’s radio show was broadcast live, from midnight to early morning. Shepherd told wonderful, funny stories about his childhood, about his family and friends, and about New York City.

I loved the guy’s humor. I loved the way he made up stories. And I started dreaming about someday going to New York. I think everyone dreams of faraway places. I know I did. I couldn’t imagine living anywhere but New York City. I still can’t.