

spending much of his youth presenting magic shows in his cellar for neighborhood friends. The magic act disappeared though when Stevens turned 16 and learned the Rev. Father Edward Flanagan, the founder of Boys Town, was going to be in Battleboro for the funeral of a Boys Town benefactor.

"I had the audacity to go up to his room and ask him if I could finish school at Boys Town," Stevens recalls.

The youngster was soon on his way to Omaha.

After graduating from Boys Town in 1944, Stevens went to California to seek his fortune as a shipyard worker. He likes to tell the story about the time he and Father Flanagan were sitting in a football stadium in San Francisco and Father Flanagan asked him if he had thought about his future. At a loss for an answer, Stevens told him he was thinking about joining the priesthood.

"I just pulled it out of the air," he says.

Following Father Flanagan's advice, Stevens left California after a year, returned to Boys Town and started classes at Creighton University. The following year, he attended a week-long retreat at a Trappist monastery in Dubuque, Iowa. It was there, that Stevens—who had always fancied himself a writer or magician—discovered what he now sees as his calling. He remained with the Trappists for the next five and one half years, but returned to Boys Town in 1952.

"That particular monk life wasn't what I wanted so I decided to find my own order," he recalls. "Other people can do it, why couldn't I?"

So Stevens just "bided his time" and became a priest for the next 28 years. And he developed an impressive resume. At age 35, Stevens joined the U.S. Air Force and became chaplain, serving at bases in Alaska, California and Japan. While stationed at Edwards Air Force Base in California, Stevens flew twice the speed of sound and claims to be "the fastest priest alive." After leaving the Air Force in 1968, he wrote several books, worked as an editor and publisher of a religious magazine in Indiana, and became the associate director of a liturgical center in Santa Fe, N.M., where he tried starting his own theological seminar.

"His enthusiasm is contagious," says Fr. Edward Gill, a friend and colleague of Stevens. "You can't help but get excited just after being in the same room with him a while."

