

An
Ordinary
Tragedy

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-a memoir of crimes and shattered lives-

Lori Hart Beninger



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*For Grant, Kelly, Steve, and JoAnn—whose memories and
abiding love for my brother made this book possible.*

Part 1

The First Shoe

“There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in.”

—Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory*

Chapter 1

1979

I DIDN'T WANT TO BE THERE. Had I found a good excuse to avoid the Great Hart Family reunion of 1979, I would have.

Which one of those prominent psychiatrists says the object of avoidance is the root of the problem? Freud? Jung? I never could keep those two straight. But one of those guys postulated an avoidance theory—and there was something Freudian or Jungian about my family's get-together that January.

Let me back up. My youngest brother Grant deserves the credit for arranging the night's festivities at the Black Angus in Martinez, wisely choosing that particular place for the Harts. The restaurant was dark and quiet, smelling of charred meat, garlic bread, and cigarettes—just as my father loved. Only the lure of a slab of beef could entice my dad away from his mountain home in those days—and Grant understood that.

Home for Daddy was a camp resort near Weaverville, California—three hundred miles away, sheltered among the trees of Northern California. To travel from there to the congestion of the San Francisco Bay Area, my parents had a long drive along winding forest roads, followed by bleak highways, and finally, after seven long hours, a dive into something akin to Hell itself. Daddy hated that trip. He wasn't fond of driving at all, but the thought of leaving the mountains and his beloved

dogs for the stink of urban life was not his idea of a good time. Still, he came.

Mom was along for the adventure. Not that she intended to enjoy herself, of course. Perhaps a misplaced sense of duty compelled her to attend. Rules and form meant more to my mother than almost anything else. If she was supposed to be there, she would be. So she came.

I understood Mom's position well. I promised to show up for many of the same reasons she did. And I didn't intend to enjoy myself, either.

Scott was there—of course. He had provided the occasion. He wanted to introduce the family to his betrothed: JoAnn. Incredibly, he was getting married.

No—I worded that badly. I should have said: incredibly, someone had agreed to marry my brother.

The Harts hadn't been together as a family for years. Our reasons were varied: distance, jobs, relationships, prison. Coordinating five individuals whose lives had diverged was not an easy task.

However, Grant managed to pull it off.

So, there we were: wrapped in the succulent stench of the Black Angus, straining to maintain a familial camaraderie that seemed never to penetrate our skins.

Mom listened, offering suggestions for the bride-to-be, not pushing her ideas. My mother had a knack for expressing just the right level of interest without getting too involved. I knew she wanted nothing to do with the affair, as her feelings for Scott mirrored mine.

Dad was quiet. But then, he was always quiet.

I attempted to follow the conversation, I really did. I made

it through the awkward introductions, engaged in a bit of expected chitchat. I tuned out when my soon-to-be sister-in-law (JoAnn) and my someday-might-be-sister-in-law (Karen) started chirping away about the jetsam of a wedding: the dress, invitations, colors, flowers, guest list. I could not have cared less.

Grant was attentive, exuding excitement at having his family all in one place, and pride at having been the one to achieve the feat—oblivious to our private discontent. “Family” is a concept my little brother embraced with all his heart—whatever it meant.

Scott, the man for whom this evening was concocted, added little more than an occasional nod, a laugh, an easy smile. He was being charming. He had always been good at that. I found him disgusting.

What kind of moron would marry my brother?

That’s the first question that entered my mind when Grant called with the dinner invitation. I know, I know: it’s not nice to call someone a moron. But nice political correctness was not a familiar concept in the 1970s. Even had it been, I couldn’t think of a more appropriate word: this girl who had agreed to be my brother’s wife had to be a moron.

However, nearly an hour into the Black Angus dinner, I had found no moron at the table. There was only a naïve girl expressing hope for her future. Here was a young woman with strong, positive feelings for this handsome middle child of an outwardly respectable middle-class family. I found JoAnn to be warm and enthusiastic and hopeful, which made my discomfort all the more ... uncomfortable.

I wanted to scream at her. “We’re not a normal family. You

don't want to be part of us. And your betrothed? *He's been in prison*, you idiot! Not just county jail, mind you. Prison! You'll be the wife of a felon!"

I kept silent and frothed.

What business was it of mine, anyway? Perhaps she already knew. Maybe she believed in him and would be a steady influence in his life, standing where his family would not: JoAnn the Good.

And so, JoAnn the Good rose from her chair with dignity. Diminutive but strong in her righteousness, she scythed through our family judgments. "Scott will not need support and forgiveness from you anymore," she might say. "He will have JoAnn the Good. The Harts are no longer needed. Take your spurious family ties and go to Hell."

But what if she knew nothing?

I twisted in my seat, imagining the poor girl crushed by the news. JoAnn the Good blubbering upon learning about the depravity of her to-be husband.

I glanced at Scott. What was he thinking, pulling an innocent girl into the cesspool of his life? My screams would be better directed at him, wouldn't they? "Haven't you fucked enough people already?" Holy shit—what if they had kids?

Then again, what if he viewed this marriage as one final chance for a "normal" life, a future beyond the stigma of felony and the upheaval of his early days? Maybe he thought of JoAnn as salvation from the dangerous currents of his soul. "*Throw me a line,*" he might have said to her. "*This time I will get to shore.*"

I needed a bathroom.

Cold water on my face and a brush through my hair helped

my decision—I would say nothing to nobody, no how. *You always overanalyze things*, my mother was fond of telling me. *Shut up and let it go*. It was not my place anyway. Who was JoAnn to me? *It's not my life, it's not my wife*, as my husband was wont to say. What did I care if Scott continued to screw up and take an entourage with him?

I didn't feel great about my choice, but indecision gives me hives.

I dried my hands and straightened my skirt and walked into the cramped hallway. Straight into Scott, headed for the men's room.

Now wouldn't you think I'd take this opportunity to ask him what he wanted, what he was doing? We were brother and sister, after all. We were alone. Sure, we were in a narrow corridor that smelled like bubble-gum room freshener, but it was private.

However, I didn't. I didn't ask a single question. What good would it have done? Those few times in our lives that I had asked him "why?" had come to nothing. A shrug. An "I don't know." This time might be different, but I didn't want a shouting match in a bathroom hallway. I didn't care anyway.

Instead, I smiled and kept my mouth shut. So did he. He smiled, and I read pleading in his eyes: *Give me this, Sis.*

That glance washed away my guilt just as I had washed away errant germs from my hands moments before. No analogies, please. My brother was no saint.

I remember very little of the remainder of the get-together. We all had busy lives, so the evening ended early. Our goodbyes were punctuated with hugs and kisses and platitudes: *nice to meet you, welcome to the family, see you at the wedding, drive safely.*

The Great Hart Family Reunion of 1979 ended with a whimper.

It was the last time the five of us were together.

Chapter 2

1958

WE WEREN'T ALWAYS LIKE THAT. I wasn't always like that. Once I cherished my brother Scott.

In 1958, the Harts had reached what would become our preeminent configuration: Daddy, Mommy, me, Scott, and newborn Grant (named after my dad).

At that time, we lived on Index Street in the San Fernando Valley suburb of Granada Hills—a stone's throw and a lifetime away from Los Angeles, California. Dad had a good job. Mom stayed home to raise us. My parents were three years into a thirty-year mortgage on that house. We had our own car. On the bell-curve of prosperity, most outsiders would have guessed we were just over the hump. I don't know if that was true—I was five years old.

My parents were both in their late twenties—a tall, handsome couple who listened to jazz and dressed in the latest cool fashions (or copies thereof). Mom had been a legal secretary at one time, but left that job and her dreams of fashion design six years earlier for a full-time position as wife and mother. She'd packed on a few pounds after three kids, but she was still an attractive woman. Daddy was movie-star gorgeous. The boys and I were collectively cute and bright and publically well-behaved. The Harts could have been the poster children for the

All-American Family of the 1950s, right down to the average 2.5 offspring.

Daddy was the sun around which Mom and the little Harts orbited—distant and awe-inspiring. As in most families, my brothers and I fought for his attention and quaked if he was displeased.

A shy and quiet man, Dad was an engineer with Lockheed—an airplane and aerospace company in the greater Los Angeles area. Before that—before I was born—he had worked at an exciting startup company. Where once he told tales of setting fences on fire with the latest experimental rockets, his move to Lockheed meant he could no longer regale his family (or anybody else) with his modest stories. Top-secret stuff went on in Lockheed's bland buildings—and secrets were to be kept. He was forbidden from divulging the level of his security clearance. My quiet father was made even more taciturn by executive order.

Mom was the caregiver and Daddy's translator—she was the person who ensured our comfort, rushed us to the doctor if our fevers got too high or our scrapes too deep, read to us and tucked us in bed with a gentle goodnight and a kiss and assurances that all was right in the world, that life was good. "Go to sleep," she would say. "Daddy needs you to be quiet. He's had a hard day. He loves you." In that way, we were informed—even if our daddy never said so—that we were prized.

Although his work took him out of town on occasion, sometimes for months at a time, mostly Daddy commuted daily. When Mom needed the car, she would drive Dad to work, picking him up at the appointed hour. My brothers and I were along for the ride—me standing beside Mom on the front

bench seat, tucked behind her shoulder as she drove, infant Scott lying swaddled on the seat beside me. Once Grant arrived, Scotty was the lucky one who stood next to my mother, the baby beside him, and me alone on the gargantuan backseat. Nineteen fifty-eight was a time before seatbelts—children’s car seats were a thing of the future. We didn’t need those things anyway because our parents were good drivers. Even used cars in the fifties were built like tanks. No one could get hurt in a tank, right?

Granada Hills was as good a place as any to live. It had been a rural community, covered in orange groves and rabbits, ripe for the exploitation of a population in need of affordable homes in the baby boomer era that followed World War II and Korea. Ours was one of the first homes in the first tract built in our subdivision—neighboring construction would rattle the surrounding fields for years.

There was little traffic (except for those crepuscular times when all of the neighborhood dads traveled to and from work—taking their family’s one-and-only car with them). The town had open space, construction sites to explore, and near-dry creek beds ripe for adventures. The elementary school was less than a mile away from our house; the shopping center was even closer.

Supervision was almost unheard of on Index Street: good weather or bad, moms let their kids loose in the mornings and didn’t expect them home until the streetlamps came on.

Tricycles, wagons, and bicycles littered the sidewalks. There were roller skates too—metal ones with little keys to tighten them onto thick-soled shoes. The wheels screeched and thudded over the sidewalk cracks and rough pavement—but

it was worth every teeth-jarring moment just to brag about having skates.

Endless enactments of Army skirmishes, cops-and-robbers, or cowboy-and-Indian confrontations played out in the front yards of Index Street daily as the neighborhood children emulated what had aired on TV the night before. Actual toy weapons were rare, but we pretended well. Never was an arrow fired so straight as from an imaginary bow or a bullet surer than when shot from a cocked finger pistol. Sometimes debates raged about whether a crucial kill had actually been made, but a spectacular death scene quieted the discord (and earned more admiration than denying you'd been shot).

At Christmastime, Index Street sparkled with lights. Mom painted colorful secular scenes on our front-facing windows (unique to the neighborhood, for no other mothers made the attempt).

When my brothers and I were deemed old enough, we were taught how to decorate our Christmas tree. There would be no haphazard, slap-dash tree in the Hart household. Our tree was symmetrical, lights evenly spaced, ornaments distributed to promote balance, each sparkling strand of tinsel set on a branch, one at a time, ends even. Daddy was an engineer, after all.

Christmas was exciting for the Hart kids. We stayed awake well into the morning hours, our little thoughts bouncing in anticipation of Santa's visit. Then, much to the almost-good-natured displeasure of my parents, we would rise before dawn, our "whispered" enthusiasm invariably rousing Mom and Dad, too. One year, we awoke at the usual predawn hour to find Santa's cookies and milk gone, boot prints in the ashes of the fireplace,

and our father sleeping peacefully on the couch. Daddy had slept through the most important visit of the year and we were incredulous! Daddy's desire for Christmas perfection was evident in more than tree decorating.

At all times, we and the other children of Index Street tussled like a litter of puppies. Our moms kept the mercurochrome ready to swab a scraped knee (relieving the sting with a gentle blow across the cut). A dishtowel filled with ice helped any bruise.

When we weren't outdoors, *The Mickey Mouse Club* or *Howdy Doody* or *Davy Crockett* entertained us. Black-and-white TV only, of course. Color TVs may have existed, but nobody on Index Street owned one. I don't think stations were broadcasting in anything but black and white in 1958 anyway.

The nearest grocery store was too far for carless moms to walk. But forward-thinking entrepreneurs had anticipated some of the isolation issues of the suburbs, for home delivery was common. Glass bottles of milk, coddled in wire baskets, were left on our porches daily. The Helms Bakery truck rambled by several times per week, the beautiful oak doors at the rear opening to reveal dozens of compartments filled to capacity, the aroma of fresh baked goods wafting from the depths. Breads and dinner rolls of every kind filled the upper drawers. The two shallow wooden trays nearest the ground, each the width of the truck, held the most-treasured sweets: delectable doughnuts and pastries covered in chocolate or maple or sugary glazes, old-fashioned and puffy ones, some filled with jelly (my personal favorite—although I hated the lemon ones). It could not have been an accident that the best treats were at the nose level of children.

Almost every family on the block had pets: the Hetzlers had a Doberman Pinscher, the Watsons had a toy poodle (and, for a brief time, a spider monkey—before she tragically hanged herself from the doll clothes they dressed her in). Mostly the Harts had cats, although we twice tried German Shepherds—until Mom got tired of them trampling her toddlers in playful exuberance, prompting a quick adoption. The Harts, especially my father, never met an animal we didn't love or ignore with equal measure. Mom took up the slack for sloppy pet ownership—Mom was the primary caregiver for all the Hart animals, human and otherwise.

My brothers and I were a polite bunch, (usually) well-behaved and dressed well for the situation, time, and budget. We were handsome as a whole. Our house was neatly kept and stylishly appointed—the furnishings and artwork a little more *avant-garde* than the neighbors, perhaps, for my parents prided themselves on their uniqueness and modernity. We owned the requisite car and TV and bicycles. We hosted the requisite parties, not scrimping on quantity or quality, but not extravagant either—my parents tried not to live beyond their means, although that was not always easy, especially with three children. The Hart kids had the latest toys, and visited nearby Disneyland every year from its opening in 1955. Our little nuclear family was surrounded by loving grandparents and cousins and various sundry relatives who mostly lived within five or ten miles of us and each other.

In 1958, the Harts were a fairytale family. To any outsider, our lives looked damned near perfect.

Chapter 3

1958 (and beyond)

THE IDYLLIC LIFE ON INDEX STREET was all true, but it was not all. Even fairytales have a dark side—including Disney’s cleaned-up versions.

Mom sheltered us from most of the dark. As in most families, money was an issue—but from that Mom kept us insulated. August meant new school clothes and a new pair of “good” shoes (for which we traveled to far-away Van Nuys to be fitted out in new Buster Browns). The clothes and shoes were sensible and intended to last until we grew out of them—sometimes an easier goal than a reality.

Mom ensured that our respective birthdays were treated as special times for parties and friends and one singular gift from Mommy (and Daddy) that proved she had been listening to our heart’s desires throughout the year. Christmas was a time of plenty (within reason) and only occasionally practical. Nonetheless, in a birthday poem penned for Daddy in February of 1959, Mom confessed to not having enough money to buy him a simple card. That didn’t lessen the love coming his way from all of his “kids” (herself included), the poem continued. My brothers and I didn’t see this card—we didn’t know of the sacrifices our folks were making to keep us in clothes and toys and food.

Occasionally even the fun in our neighborhood went awry. In addition to minor scrapes and bruises, there were bloodied noses and hurt feelings. My chin was crisscrossed with stitches by the time I was eight years old after I fell off my new bike—my gift from Santa the year Dad slept through the jolly man’s nocturnal visit. When he was three, Grant dislocated his finger while running around an island-like configuration of cupboards inside the main entrance of our house. We had been warned repeatedly against running indoors—so the resultant surgery repairing the toddler’s injury was met with mixed emotions of grave concern and slight disappointment from my parents. Would we never learn?

Injuries could have been worse. Once, my brothers “borrowed” a few steak knives from the kitchen—allegedly to hunt yellow scorpions in our backyard, scared up by recent nearby construction. When that proved boring (or fictional—for I’d never seen a yellow scorpion in our backyard), the boys scampered to the orchard with the intent of scaling a tree, the blades in tow. Mom caught them. The knives were washed and returned to their rightful place with “Wait until your father gets home” ringing in my brothers’ ears.

There were other near misses to overall health. Scott and Grant dumped an entire bottle of Alka-Seltzer into a gallon jug of distilled water once to “watch it fizz.” Then they drank the concoction. Fortunately, they didn’t like the taste well enough to get much of it past their lips. On a different occasion, they were caught under the kitchen table with several cans of Coors beer. Taste wasn’t an issue on that day.

Tussles among the Hart children were unrelenting. We bickered about everything—who got to place the special red-bell

ornament on the Christmas tree, who was the real owner of the unbroken Disneykins (me, of course), who got to sit in the front seat when Mom was driving, who received the most Christmas presents (no one, for Mom ensured an equal number for all—and we counted, greedy little monsters that we were), who got the bigger slice of cake. Our petty disputes were incessant.

“Mom, he touched me” and “Mom, she’s crowding me” were common utterances, especially in the car. In response, Mom told us to “knock it off”—which settled the matter for the moment but usually without satisfying any of us.

Our fate was worse if Dad happened to be driving. I learned to sit in the seat directly behind him so that he couldn’t hit me when he reached his long arms over the seat to smack the leg of a whining child—not caring if the recipient were the actual whiner. His arm didn’t bend backwards, thank heavens.

The issue with Hart road trips was that my dad didn’t like to stop—once on the road, barring the necessity for gas, he was balls out for the ultimate destination. Interesting sights along the way were left in the dust. Tough luck if any of us hadn’t taken advantage of the gas-station facilities at the time of an official stop—a full-out sob fest was the only way to get Daddy to pull into a station when a fill-up was not necessary. Dad had a goal. That was that.

My parents were baffled by our fighting. Having grown up as, essentially, only children (Mom was eight when her brother Doug was born and Dad was twelve before his stepbrother Mitchell appeared), they expected children to play nice in the sandbox, especially *their* children. Since that didn’t happen, they resorted to punishments typical of the time—nothing that

caused permanent physical injury, but certainly actions that would land them in jail (and us in protective services) these days.

Mostly our penalties were doled out by hand—literally. A good smack fixed a lot of ills. My parents had established rules for such penalties: only open palms, never backhands, never on the face or head, never a sneak attack. Both of my folks had grown up in brutal households. As a result, they each vowed never to treat their children as they had been.

To help find a cure for our unruliness (without repeating their history), Mom read Dr. Benjamin Spock's treatise on childrearing cover to cover, albeit for naught. After a long day of dealing with squabbling children, she didn't have the patience to remember generic advice. Dad didn't have time to read after a stressful day of top-secret missile design and martini luncheons. Dr. Spock went unheeded.

Little help was available for my folks to find an equitable solution to their misbehaving kids. So we were smacked in accordance with the Hart rules. However, at a certain juncture, our infractions warranted something more than the usual punishments—something administered at day's end, following the threat of "Wait until your father gets home." Once we "came of age" (which was generally deemed to be upon entry into kindergarten), our infractions might earn us "The Belt"—a thin strap usually applied by a reluctant Daddy. The Belt was the ultimate punishment. It carried a nasty sting, but its most effective threat was to our pride.

I don't wish to belabor descriptions of The Belt, for it was a weapon rarely used. But when it was, we remembered. More importantly, The Belt left a welt, but never a scar. Just as with

any other punishments, my parents established strict rules for The Belt's infrequent application: only on legs and buttocks, never on bare skin, never more than three "lashes" (mostly fewer), no public floggings (in the privacy of our respective bedrooms only, thank you very much), and never, never, never the buckle end.

Regardless of its infrequency and restricted application, the mere mention of The Belt caused considerable consternation for my brothers and me. So, to keep some of the disputes out of my parents' literal reach, Scott and I devised our own method to end squabbles. It too involved a weapon—"The Fist." The Fist was perfect, for it was portable and easily disappeared whenever an adult figure entered the scene.

Instead of screaming "Mom, she won't let me play," or "Mom, he broke my favorite toy," the wronged party would strategically strike with The Fist, using an overhand motion against the middle of the wrongdoer's back—about level with the heart. The amount of force used was never commensurate with the crime—the punishment was not deemed to be enough unless the recipient was rendered speechless.

We also had our rules:

1. No delayed sneak attacks. The Fist had to be used at the time of the infraction.
2. One or two strikes was enough. The Fist was not intended to maim.
3. No one under the age of five could participate.
Recipients must be able to give as good as they got.
4. And, of primary importance, the receiving party could not utter a word or sound.

Thanks in part to this latter rule, my parents never learned about The Fist. And it was breathtakingly effective—one blow and the dispute was, most often, over.

However, The Fist wasn't practical on a road trip—thus prompting my tactical maneuvering in the backseat.

Disagreements may have been everyday occurrences among the Hart children, but our parents weren't much better. Their rules were different, however. They yelled at us anywhere, any time, but refused to fight each other when *anybody* was present. Sneak attacks were common between them—I suppose that was no surprise, since they expected to keep their fights undetected.

Privacy may well have been their aim, but they couldn't keep the tension from their bodies when they fought. We knew. Scott and Grant and I picked up on the vibrations they carried in their souls. There was also the hole in their bedroom door that appeared one morning. That, too, was hard to ignore.

Sense memories of my parents' fights pepper my childhood. The first was shortly after Scotty's birth, when I was only two and one-half—I *felt* that disagreement and remember it still.

A bed had been set up where our dining table should have been, in the little Van Nuys' apartment where Mommy, Daddy, and I were living, before the move to Index Street. Mommy said she was sleeping on this bed so that she and newborn Scotty wouldn't disturb Daddy. "Daddy needs a good night's sleep for work," she told me. Yet somehow I knew that wasn't true—I knew they were mad at each other.

During this time, the air crackled with Mom's anger. Her rage was not directed at my baby brother or me except, perhaps, in flashes of impatience. She didn't remain in this state

for very long—a week perhaps. But hers was a fury that jarred me and kept me quiet and cautious around this woman as she withdrew into herself like a clam, sending furious sparks out into the world from a self-imposed sanctuary.

At the time, I didn't know why she was mad—although I would come to know later. I recall only the lightning-strike vibration seared into my cortex, igniting a visceral response any time it recurred.

Unfortunately, it would recur.

BEFORE SCOTT WAS BORN, Mom took great care to prepare me for my new sibling. She understood her attention would thereafter be split between me and the baby—and wanted to avoid any unhappiness that might result. As her due-date approached, she furnished our apartment with a new crib, bassinet, bottles and sterilizing paraphernalia, onesies and baby blankets and diapers and pins and powders. At the same time, she bought me miniatures of the same—doll-size versions of the real-life accoutrements. When she pre-washed the baby's clothes, my doll clothes were added to the mix. As she organized everything, we cleared a space in my bedroom for these new acquisitions.

The day Scotty came home from the hospital, a new Tiny Tears baby doll was delivered to my arms—so that Mom and I could stand side-by-side and care for our respective babies. When Scotty was hungry, I fed my baby doll, too. When he needed changing, the diapers were stripped off of Tiny Tears and replaced with a fresh pair (for she wet as well as cried “real tears”).

It worked. Mom's plan to seamlessly introduce this new little being into my life was a success. I hadn't lost her attention, I had gained something that enraptured us both. I was a big girl (at two and one-half)—a big sister with a new little baby of my own.

If I suffered any pangs of jealousy or resentment of Scott, I don't remember them. If my behavior changed as a result of this alteration of status, it wasn't significant enough for Mom to note in my baby book (although other bratty behavior at a later age did make it there, so I know she was watching). Scotty entered my life with my full acceptance. I had a baby brother. I adored him.

Three years later, I was to have yet another little brother to adore, too. Mom's one regret would be that boys weren't supposed to play with dolls (as dictated by the times). Therefore, her options for keeping Scotty insulated from any loss of attention were limited when Grant came on the scene.

EVERYTHING GREW ON INDEX STREET: Scotty and me (and eventually Grant), the neighborhood kids, the perfect dichondra lawn that Daddy nurtured, and the tulip tree in our parkway—the latter a source of pride because it was the biggest and healthiest on the block.

Grandparents came and went with regularity (they lived only a few miles away—at least those we were speaking to). I was never without playmates. A steady stream of new births ensured that, when each of them came of age, my brothers too would never be without companions.

On Index Street, my parents adopted the routines that

would define their lives for several years: Mom cooked and sewed and kept both the house and her children neat and clean (as prescribed by my father, with Marine-Corps rigidity). She cuddled and coddled us through all of the usual childhood diseases, tonsillectomies, pneumonia, bronchitis, and many others, entertaining and reading to us, and tucking us into bed at the requisite time. Dad returned home most nights to demand dinner, a martini, and complete peace. He spent most weekends on projects around the house—of which there were plenty.

Among her motherly activities, Mom kept a baby book for each of her children, chronicling our lives: our slightest burp, each health issue, a list of vaccinations and when they were administered, when teeth came in and when they fell out, our first words. Among the pages of these books she tucked our hospital bracelets, doctor's reports, growth charts, birthday cards, and lists of gifts and givers. Mom was attentive to the smallest detail of our young lives.

In her beautiful, flowing script, Mom documented our respective dispositions, cute and silly things we said and did, interests we expressed. Scott and, upon his arrival three years later, Grant's respective biographies benefited from numerous loving anecdotes—most of which were oft repeated over the years for amusement.

Scotty was:

So completely different from his sister. Hasn't a gentle bone in his body. I call him the original Mau-Mau terrorist. His attitude is one of 'go'... banging, slamming, running, and constantly doing things he knows are not to be done.

He's very loving ... when he knows I'm mad at him, he grins, runs over to me and pats my leg and croons 'Sweetie' to me—devil or no, what can you do?

*He's much more of a baby at this age than his sister. He learns very fast. Everything interests him. But he is **very** independent. Feeds himself, holds his own glass. When he's through eating, his spoon, plate and cup or glass go on the floor—now!*

Loves music, color, life.

The most gratifying little person I've ever met.

Young Scott giggled when talked to and chortled at my stuffed panda bear. He and I would lie together on our stomachs in front of the TV, with our Mickey Mouse ears on, enraptured by Disney's Mouseketeer show—at least for a time. It wasn't long before my energetic brother "stole" my Mouse ears, laughing and running until he fell, still a-giggle.

He washed my doll clothes in the toilet after watching Mom flush the filth of Grant's diaper away in a similar manner. Unfortunately, some of those doll clothes became lost in the bathroom's bowels. Years later, when the septic tank failed and a clean-out was required (much to the amusement of the neighborhood kids), filthy remnants of a doll's wardrobe were found to have contributed to the fault.

Scott's carefully crafted journal described a demonstrative child, crazy about both Daddy and me. He loved to kiss and be kissed, to be held—albeit only for a short duration between adventures. *He loved to laugh, Mom penned, and he loved soft things that he could pet or stroke.* Above all, he loved soft things.

There was fun and laughter and discovery and love in Mom's stories about Scotty, codified in his book by an enthusiastic

young mother. There was physicality and immediacy prevalent on each page. My parents' experience with Scott was turning out to be quite different from what they'd known with me—Scott was not a quiet, serious child like I was. In fact, we could not have been more opposite. I was dark-haired, dark-eyed, and what my mom came to think of as an old soul. Scott was fair-haired, blue-eyed, and a dervish with an engaging and winning smile. While my energy level and quiet interests dove-tailed well with that of my parents, Scotty was like fireworks on the Fourth of July.

Even at his most rambunctious, Scott was cherished.

Mom noted nothing special in Scott's book when the happy, dimpled Grant arrived in 1958. Her writings don't mention my father's absence at Grant's birth, on business in El Paso. Judging by the baby book, I would have guessed all was well. It was only later I learned she had other things on her mind.

Chapter 4

1960

SCOTTY AND KELLY WATSON were twins born of separate parents. From the time they were old enough to walk, the boys went everywhere together. Same age, same size, same coloring, same interests. *Partners in crime*, my mom noted in Scott's book.

The Watsons lived three doors away from us. I mention this only for orientation; there was nothing about our street or its surrounds that Kelly or Scotty considered a border or a boundary or a limit. Three doors, six doors, nine blocks—it didn't matter to them.

The deserted wash that the five-year-olds called their own was at least a half-mile away from our neighborhood. But that distance didn't hinder Kelly and Scott. Summers and weekends, the partners would meet early each morning and head for the gully, before their respective parents could take notice and assign tasks. All that really mattered was that the boys abide by the Golden Rule of Index Street: be home before the streetlamps came on. Every family insisted.

Scott and Kelly may have obeyed the Rule in the strictest sense, but that didn't mean they had to do it quietly. The partners believed rules were meant to be bent to hell.

Since a streetlamp was an unworthy object anyway, the boys

made a game of it—to prove its inconsequence. Their triumph was legend. Scott and Kelly became the undisputed champions of a daredevil game devised to conquer and subdue this symbol of parental rule: The Streetlamp Challenge.

It started sanely enough, I suppose. What kid doesn't like to climb? But we of Index Street were sorely limited in our selection. The parkway trees in the neighborhood were still young, as in most new tracts; they would likely have broken in half, even with our limited weight. And the trees of the orange grove were unruly with twigs and thorns poking and prodding any would-be climber, often drawing blood. The eucalyptus, planted in a break that fronted the orchard, were impossible; the branches were high and the bark peeled off and puddled at the base like discarded hula skirts, taking any would-be climber with it.

On the other hand, the impartial grey metal of the streetlamp stood straight and tall, without protrusions. At first, we scrambled up only a few feet, daring each other to greater heights with each attempt. We climbed and strained and stretched. Before long, "the highest" became the horizontal bar at the top. Few reached that lofty height, twenty-five feet above the pavement. But some did. And two of the "some" were Kelly and Scott.

In characteristic fashion, my brother and his friend pushed the limits further. They climbed the entire twenty-five-foot height of the standard, to the horizontal bar that stretched over the pavement below, to *straddle* the bar. Two pint-sized daredevils without support, without wings, without fear.

None of the other children garnered the courage to sit up there, legs dangling. Kelly and Scott had no problem. Time

and again, they showed their prowess. They were the Kings of Cool on Index Street.

My parents were as oblivious to the Streetlamp Challenge as they were to The Fist. None of the parents knew about the Streetlamp Challenge, even in its earliest incarnations. Some things parents shouldn't know.

THE CORNER HOUSE, the house next to the Watson's, was owned by a guy named Stan. Stan's house was the one I wanted to avoid at Halloween because its entrance was dark and spooky and he played weird music to greet the trick-or-treaters—it scared the hell out of me. His yard was covered in ivy—I thought it looked as if someone had been buried underneath it, especially at night. Maybe even several somebodies.

Scott and Kelly weren't afraid of Stan's, however, bravely searching that ivy for snails.

On those occasional evenings when the parents overlooked the Streetlamp Rule (which was seldom, but to our delight did occur on some summer nights), the neighborhood kids (other than me) played a game where they stood on the corner in front of Stan's house, waiting for a car to approach. The goal was to be the last to jump into the ivy without being lit up by the car's headlights. Anyone illuminated by the lights had to freeze until the car passed, thus losing the round. Scott and Kelly rarely lost.

I'LL BLAME "THE DAY" on a sugar craving.

All of the Harts had a sweet tooth. Mom always kept candy

and cookies and other sweets in the house to calm the yearnings. Everything was stored high in the cupboards, to avoid bingeing, but certainly not to deprive us. Tasty treats were doled out after school, after dinner. We had only to ask.

Despite their lofty position in the cupboards, however, Mom had less control than she imagined. By the age of four, Scott had learned to open the kitchen drawers and, using them as stairs, gain access to any goodie openly hidden in the higher reaches. My brother Grant and I most certainly followed suit, but Scott was the pioneer. For a while, Mom tied the drawers shut—but we managed our way through the ropes and, eventually, she abandoned that tack.

Sometimes what Mom had in the cupboards didn't satisfy Scott's cravings.

Scotty was lucky. I have never met another person who was as adept as he at finding odd change and other forms of money with increasing frequency. He always had money—more than our allowance, more than either Grant or me. Where every so often I might find a dime or two on the sidewalks, Scott unearthed dollar bills. If there was money to be had, Scott would find it. And he quickly learned that money could satisfy those extra cravings.

J.J. Newbury's was our local variety store, located on the far side of San Fernando Mission Boulevard—the nearest busy street to our quiet little neighborhood. But "nearest" was a relative term—San Fernando Mission Boulevard was over a half-mile away from Index Street. Given the great distance, the moms had little reason to think their children would wander so far. Until The Day.

In keeping with his luck, Scott had found five dollars on

The Day. A candy bar cost five cents in 1960—so five dollars was a bonanza.

Since everything went better with chocolate—and with Kelly—the boys headed for J.J. Newbury's. They walked down Ruffner to San Fernando Mission Boulevard, hazarding the four-lane road without benefit of streetlights, stop signs, or crosswalks. They returned some time later, laden with tiny toy cars and candy wrappers—to face questioning parents and increasing horror as their tale unfolded.

To this day, my mother shakes her head and places her hand over her heart when she thinks about what might have happened to her little boy and his cohort in that deadly terrain on The Day.

However, the real horror of The Day for my mother was something that earned Scott both The Belt and Mom's everlasting distrust. He had “found” that five-dollar bill in my grandmother’s purse.

AS FAR AS MOM WAS CONCERNED, thievery was a violation of trust not to be tolerated in a family unit.

Mom’s father had been a thief—as she and my grandmother always maintained—pilfering money from the family at any opportunity. Mom hated him for this and other petty crimes committed at various times in her youth. As a result, Grampa Byron had been banned from her life as soon as she assumed the mantle of adulthood—which apparently was soon after I was born. The mention of his name brought a pinched, vitriolic look to her face. She couldn’t speak of him except with contempt. When she and her mom got together, the hate-fest

was vocal and bitter. “The Old Man” was a frequent subject of discussion—and an unredeemable pariah.

As a result of her father’s filching, Mom had grown protective of possessions and privacy. None of us, including Daddy, had carte blanche to touch personal things, especially a purse.

Scott had broken that rule.

Mom called for Daddy to apply The Belt that evening.

Despite his usual *boys-will-be-boys* unwillingness, Daddy complied. Given Mom’s fury, perhaps he thought it best that he be the one to administer punishment for that particular infraction.

THERE WAS SOMETHING WRONG with Mr. Watson’s car. The engine struggled to turn over and, as he drove to and from his workplace in Encino, the car sputtered and coughed like a tubercular patient. The mechanics were called upon to do some magic. They tuned and cleaned and tested, but still the car wouldn’t work properly.

Then one morning, Mr. Watson discovered his son Kelly and Scott feeding eucalyptus leaves into the gas tank. By their own admission, they had done it before.

Punishments were dispensed. However, nothing would change the fact that engines and eucalyptus leaves didn’t mix. It was time for the Watsons to replace the car.

The shiny new sedan was beautiful: leather interior with all of the luxuries available at the time. It had room for all. I don’t recall what kind of car it was, but I remember the pride the Watsons took in their new vehicle. Nobody else on the block had a brand-new car.

The Watsons celebrated the acquisition with a vacation.

I have no idea who invented Green Stamps (and I'm not exactly sure I understand how anybody made money with them). But that doesn't matter: Green Stamps were everywhere in 1960. Every service station in California (and beyond, I'm told) had attendants responsible for filling gas tanks, washing windshields, and (along with change), doling out wads of Green Stamps. The practice was simple and ubiquitous.

Once these colorful, awful-tasting stamps were pasted into flimsy booklets, they took on the aspect of a philosopher's stone—transforming into currency. They could be traded at the nearest Green Stamp Redemption Center for gadgets and toys and clothes and any number of handy items. The companion Green Stamp Catalogue was evident in nearly every home. The Catalogue described the wonderful things you could "buy" with your Green Stamps, specifying the number of booklets required to "purchase" each lovely item, the desired items carefully circled. Every family knew, down to the half book, how many Green Stamps it took to buy happiness.

Upon returning home from their celebratory two-week road trip, the Watsons had racked up significant mileage and Green Stamps—the latter tucked away in the glove box of their new car. Mrs. Watson had the wish-list catalogue items circled. All that remained was to paste those stamps into the booklets and redeem, redeem, redeem.

The same day the Watsons returned to Index Street, Scott and Kelly met for a day of play. It had been two weeks since they last saw each other—they could wait no longer.

If nothing else, the boys were thorough.

After a restful day indoors, Mr. Watson ventured to his new

car to find Green Stamps pasted over the dashboard, along the inside of the driver's door, across the ceiling, and covering the leather seats (front and back).

There would be no redemption: of Green Stamps—or of two little boys, for that matter.

The Belt was exercised in the Hart household that day. Knowing what I do now of the volatile nature of Kelly's family, I cringe at the thought of what might have happened at the Watsons'. As with much in this story, that knowledge came only later.

MOM WAS TEACHING ME TO SEW one day when Scotty ran into the house, crying that Kelly had hit him.

"What did you do to him?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? He hit you for no reason at all?"

Mom never believed her children were blameless in any situation. In fact, she often played the skeptic and assumed just the opposite: the Hart kids were guilty until proven innocent.

Scott stumbled through some excuse that Mom didn't believe. She prevented him from lying further by ordering him to stop whining. "Hit him back if you don't like it," she said calmly. It was not her fight and she didn't think two five-year-olds could do much damage to each other.

Scott and Kelly both ended up with bloodied noses that day and were ordered to stay away from one another for a while. However, that caused an even bigger uproar. Soon, no one in either household could stand the protests. Within days, the two

were released from purgatory back into their tight friendship, all blows forgiven.

Scott and Kelly. Kelly and Scott.

The whole neighborhood knew the boys: the blond twins. Scott and Kelly were the little ruffians who jumped fences and scampered through backyards at will. Brick or cinderblock walls couldn't keep them from their destination, whatever that might be. Why go around an obstacle when you can go over it, especially when important playtime was at stake? The shortest route was always just beyond the next fence. All shortcuts were employed at all times.

Kelly and Scott shared everything: candy, toys, blame.

The Hetzlers had been on Index Street as long as the Harts. But they became one of the first families to leave when Mr. Hetzler's job transferred to another state. In the summer of 1960, the Hetzlers had vacated their house and were waiting for its sale *in absentia*.

Whose idea it was to break into the empty house is lost to history now. Kelly claims that both he and my brother made that choice; but is that possible? Can individuals simultaneously decide to become vandals?

The real estate agent first approached the Watsons. The litany of damage was substantial: curtains torn from their rods, walls defaced, general mayhem. The agent insisted that young Kelly was guilty of the crime.

Mrs. Watson was not like my mother: she defended Kelly. She was certain that he would not have done such a thing. But, eventually, she found it hard to argue with the evidence: Kelly had scrawled his name, in his distinctive five-year-old

handwriting, in large block letters on one wall, using the ashy residue from the fireplace. He had only just learned to write.

My brother had written his own name on a wall opposite of Kelly's masterpiece. A visit to the Harts was next on the real estate agent's docket.

NOTHING GETS ATTENTION faster than a whisper.

One night, a long time past bedtime, I heard my parents' voices as they entered the hallway leading to our rooms. Barring something major, my parents usually stayed away from our end of the house after dark. Their bedroom was on the far side. Children in bed meant, at last, alone time for Mom and Dad. They rarely wasted alone time on visits to our territory.

All had been quiet in our sector anyway—my brothers weren't fighting in the room they shared, nor was I singing (a complaint my brothers often raised once the lights were out). Therefore, my parents' presence was significant and the whispered commotion unusual.

I opened my bedroom door only a little, catching a glimpse of Daddy as he carried Scotty down the hall. Mom was close behind. They were headed into the boys' bedroom. Scott was crying.

"Go back to bed," Mom whispered to me.

"What's wrong with Scotty?" I asked, copying her hushed tones.

"He went to visit the new puppies," Mom responded, "and accidentally hurt one of them."

The Watsons were trying their hand at breeding poodles and

their family dog, Sammy, had recently given birth to several pups.

Although I found Mom's explanation unsatisfactory in its brevity, her tone was clear—any more questions would have to wait until the next day. Even in a whisper, “go to bed” was a powerful order.

My parents were still upset the next day—so I again saved my questions. In fact, I was in my teens before I heard the full story.

That night the Watson family had been out at a family gathering. They returned late to face a pathetic scene: my five-year-old brother sitting in the middle of their laundry room, crying and cuddling an injured pup. My parents were called.

He had wanted to play with the puppies, he told them. Anything soft and warm and pet-able was a sure attraction for Scott. In his exuberance to be with the tiny dogs, however, he had stepped on and broken the leg of one of the pups. He hadn't meant to—he just wanted to play with them.

However innocent his excuse, my parents were not amused. Rules had been broken: children should stay put once tucked into bed; children shouldn't wander the streets late at night; children should honor locked doors, children should be gentle with animals.

Instead, Scott had left the warmth of his bed and the safety of our house, walked, barefoot and clad only in pajamas, in the dark, three doors away, broken into the Watsons' house, and damaged a helpless puppy. The “shoulds” of our lives had been violated. None of this should have happened.

Worse for my parents, however, was one additional detail, which I wasn't to learn until years later. When found, Scott

was no longer in his pajamas. Instead, he had been wearing soft lacy panties that belonged to Kelly's sister.

Chapter 5

1962

MY DAD WAS A NATURAL-BORN ENGINEER. He was brilliant at electrical concepts and design, and had advanced at Lockheed as a result. Unlike his peers, however, Daddy didn't have a college degree. Although that hadn't hampered him for nearly a decade, as he rose in the ranks of Lockheed's hierarchy, the lack eventually meant a stall. Given the growing demands of his family, that wasn't acceptable to my father.

So, Dad went back to college in 1961, working days and attending school in the evenings, with weekends dedicated to studying and homework. Sort of.

Three rollicking children screaming through the house did not make his task easy. He should have expected this, I suppose, since we had already proven we couldn't be trusted to give Daddy the time and space he needed for himself.

The year before, Dad had tried his hand at learning the guitar. Instead of respecting his right to cultivate a personal hobby, however, my brothers and I invaded his practice time with pleas for him to teach us, assuming the guitar as mutual property, flipping without permission through his music books for pictures of where to place our tiny fingers on the frets of this novel, fascinating instrument. Like our squabbling, we were relentless with our demands.

Daddy eventually abandoned his musical pursuit.

Mom tried to subdue us, both during his guitar phase and, later, when night school became the imperative. But she lost the battles. My brothers and I were a force to behold—selfish and headstrong, every one of us.

For Dad, the loss of both the diversion of music and the guitar had been disappointing—the loss of time and space to finish his schooling left him snappish. After a year, Daddy gave up night school, only slightly closer to that liberating degree.

MY MOTHER DIDN'T WEATHER NIGHT SCHOOL any better than Dad. She didn't have the studying to deal with, but she did have the near-solo burden of childrearing during those fretful months. Or perhaps I should describe it as child-corraling. I don't remember us being any more rambunctious than other children, but neither did we try very hard to be cooperative.

My parents' tempers were both short during this time. Mom was particularly tense, because her job (as she saw it) was to make life perfect for my father. That meant a spotless home, well-cooked meals, and quiet, respectful children. She did her job well on the first two, but was fretful when the latter eluded her.

One day not long before Daddy abandoned his dreams of a degree, Mom sat all three of us down at the dining table.

"If I have to choose between you and your father," she announced, "I will choose your father."

This proclamation was strange and worrisome to me. I have used the pronoun "we" when describing the antics of my

brothers and me; but by 1962, I was ten years old—a generally studious child without much need of discipline or younger brothers. By that time, I had even begun to distance myself from The Fist—one of Scott’s well-placed blows the prior summer had left me believing I might actually die from this ugly ritual. I don’t think my change of heart had anything to do with maturing—it was more self-preservation.

Still, Mom’s strange “lecture” put me squarely alongside my unruly brothers. I was dismayed by this realization, but didn’t ask why. Her self-imposed *raison d’etre* was to please my dad. Whatever had triggered Mom to make this announcement, she meant the message for us all.

I USUALLY DON’T REMEMBER DREAMS, let alone describe them to others. But one morning at breakfast, sometime in the year following Daddy’s stab at night school, I shared an odd and vivid dream with my mom and brothers. The oddity of the dream—and the additional oddity I discovered the next morning—spurred me to the retelling.

In my dream, I had been asleep, startled awake by a rustling noise in my darkened room. I sat up to find someone standing at the foot of the bed, silhouetted against the pale light of the window.

“Who is it?” I asked in my dream. “Who’s there?” The figure had been moving—but suddenly stopped at my question.

There was silence for a moment. Then the silhouette moved again, passing the window, fading into the darkness as it drifted in the direction of my door. I felt the air current pass over my body as the figure moved beside the bed.

I was not frightened, for I knew I was dreaming. Besides, the figure was leaving and all would be normal soon.

Still, I called out once more: "Who is it?"

My visitor passed into the hallway in silence, pausing only to close the bedroom door. I heard the scrape of fingernails across the face of the door, followed by a soft click as it closed. Then silence. My visitor was gone.

Nestling back into my pillow, the dream faded. The rest of my slumber was not troubled.

I might not have told my family of this peculiar dream except for one thing. When I awoke the next morning, the top drawer of my bureau was open. My underwear drawer.

I was a meticulous child. I didn't leave drawers open. But I was also ten years old and still believed in Santa Claus. I had no trouble trusting a dream to manifest itself this way.

Chapter 6

1963

AFTER WHAT I CAME TO THINK OF AS The Night of Whispers, nothing seemed to change between Scott and the Watsons. The Night passed mostly out of memory, or (at least) was relegated to fable status, alongside other boyish pranks.

The landscape of the neighborhood did change, however. Our original next-door neighbors, the Daleys, were gone. The Morrows bought the house on the left when Willa, my artist friend, moved away. The Hetzlers had vacated a couple of years before, their home restored and reoccupied. The orange grove and eucalyptus break across the street were annihilated, replaced by houses with floor plans that mirrored ours. The family that was to provide both Scott and me each with a best friend, the Wings, moved to Index Street along with dozens of others. Kids grew taller and the toys that were left in the yards overnight changed in size and complexity as we did.

If Scott made any other late-night forays to the neighbors, he was not discovered. He was found out for other things, some of which merited The Belt, but it wasn't for strange nocturnal journeys. He continued to be lucky at finding money.

Scott started school the September after The Night. Eventually, my parents were to be disappointed when he didn't earn the type of grades they had come to expect because of me.

He didn't fail any subjects, but he excelled only at recess and sports. He was smart, but he wasn't interested in school except for its social structure. Blond and blue-eyed with a winning smile, academics weren't essential to his popularity. Few denied the attractiveness of this beautiful boy.

He may have looked like an angel, but my parents weren't satisfied that good looks and charm were going to get Scotty through life. They tried many tactics to get him focused on school: praise, guilt, anything. Yelling was ineffective—Scott would hang his head, playing the penitent, their words rolling over him like distant thunder.

He was fitted for glasses soon after a school eye exam revealed he was farsighted. However Scotty didn't need glasses on the playground, so they were "misplaced" with regularity. Finally, when my parents could afford to replace the spectacles no longer, they warned his teachers that he might need some help with reading (with Mom augmenting the instruction any time she could get him to sit still long enough for a book) and urged them to assign him a seat at the front of the class for maximum supervision. Despite their efforts, Scotty's inattentiveness was unabated.

Of course, he needed to be *in* class to be inattentive. Even after having been driven to school and watched as he disappeared into the crowds of students, Scott managed to slip out and spend the school day at play, usually with Kelly. Once Grant started school, he too was recruited on Scotty's midweek vacations. Scott was an equal-opportunity truant.

Mom never learned of the absences. From the outset of this activity, Scott had forged the required notes of explanation, signing my mother's name. No one in the school office noticed

the childish handwritten or thought to compare the signature on the notes with those on any other paperwork from home. And somehow he managed to keep the frequency of his escapades below the level of direct parental advisement.

For Scott, fun was best had with a crowd. Kelly was always his first choice, but he often included my little brother and other kids as well. One such neighbor boy was developmentally challenged, albeit to a nominal degree; but that didn't matter to Scott—the child was an integral part of Scotty's “gang” and was not made to feel apart from the others. Unlike many well-liked kids, Scott's popularity didn't stem from exclusion of the odd. He was an equal-opportunity social organizer, too.

Part 2

On The Road

“The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved, and rejection is the hell he fears.”

– John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*

Chapter 1

1979

I DIDN'T ATTEND SCOTT AND JOANN's wedding in June of 1979. If I had an excuse at the time I don't remember what it was. I hope it was plausible. I also hope I had the decency to send a present and a card. I don't recall that I did.

My parents didn't attend the wedding either, but they had good reason. Their excuse was Pinewood Cove.

Pinewood Cove was my dad's dream. It was a camp resort he'd begun, after years of planning, in the mid-1970s on a Northern California lake named for a California politician, Clair Engle.

The locals didn't call the lake by its real name. They hated it, protesting Clair Engle's hijacking of their lake for his ego (the poor man had died in 1964, but that didn't matter to the residents of the closest town, Weaverville). Rumors abound that, for many years, when someone asked the way to Clair Engle Lake, they were directed to the nearby sewage treatment facility. Only the moniker Trinity Lake was acceptable to Weaverville-ites.

The Pinewood Cove resort is still perched on the slopes above Trinity Lake, albeit much changed from these early days.

At the time of Scotty's wedding, Pinewood Cove was approaching its third full year of operation. Since June was the

official beginning of camping season, my parents couldn't attend the wedding, even had they wanted to. Too much was at stake for them to leave the property boundaries, even for a day.

Grant wasn't in attendance either, but I have no idea why. I'm sure he would have been there, had it been possible. He didn't feel about Scott as I did.

Despite the immediate family's absence, the groom was well represented. Both of my grandmothers were there, along with Grampy (my dad's stepfather), Uncle Mitchell (my dad's step-brother) and Mitch's wife Judy.

The ceremony was held at a country club somewhere in Southern California, in one of those rooms reserved for corporate gatherings. Photographs showed a podium smothered in ferns and flowers in an attempt to make it more altar-like—although to my way of thinking the quantity of greenery made the dais look like it belonged in a jungle rather than a church.

The minister was a woman, dressed in a simple white skirt-suit. Unfortunately, she sported one of the most outlandish hairstyles I'd ever seen—her locks were auburn in the middle with a broad sweep of white curling on each side. She looked like she was sporting a ram's head. Spooky.

JoAnn chose yellow and white for her wedding: bright and sunny. Had I been listening at the Black Angus dinner, I might have anticipated that.

In the photographs taken at the ceremony and the reception that followed, my brother and JoAnn looked happy. Mamo (our nickname for my mom's mother) corroborated this in the letter to my folks that accompanied the photographs. I suspected Mamo exaggerated her descriptions of the beauty and joy as a dig at my mom for her absence. But that may have been

me spinning—I'd learned to be suspicious of my grandmother's motives by then.

Nonetheless, the casual photos taken by amateur photographers were lovely.

I wished the young couple well, at least in my head. I hope I did so in writing, too, but I can't remember. All I know was that I was not in attendance on the happy occasion. I'm sure my excuse was ironclad.

Chapter 2

1964

INDEX STREET AND THE WORLD continued to change. Neighbors came and went. I received a transistor radio for my birthday and soon discovered The Beatles. The previous autumn we had watched a presidential assassination, and the subsequent execution-style shooting of his killer, play out on our TV.

When Lockheed Missiles and Space Corporation elected to close several of its Southern California facilities, Daddy was offered a transfer to an area nestled in the shadow of San Francisco: Santa Clara County. A lot of aerospace activity put the County on the map during the 1960s and Lockheed was a big part of that.

I'm not sure my dad had much choice about the transfer. An engineer without a four-year degree couldn't be picky about job assignments. When Northern California was offered, he accepted.

Mom welcomed the opportunity for change. Like any close-knit community, and despite my parents' best efforts, our Index neighbors knew everything about the Harts. Had that "everything" been of a positive nature, I doubt Mom would have minded. She was proud of the new cars, new clothes, and new furnishings that passed into our lives. But Scott's escapades

never remained private—and my mother lived with the knowledge that even mere acquaintances on Index Street probably knew ugly secrets about our family. My mom didn't appreciate such exposure.

I had completed elementary school and would be attending junior high (the old terminology for middle school) that fall, so something new was already on my horizon—I didn't anticipate any increase in trauma because of a move. I had only one really close friend, Marcia Wing—I would keep in touch with her through letters for several years.

Scott and Grant whined about the impending disruption to their lives, but our parents weren't tolerant of that for long. There would be no gentle cajoling. We were moving. Period. Adjustments would have to be made.

As soon as school ended that June, we Harts bundled ourselves and a few possessions into our first-ever-new 1964 Ford Thunderbird—a teal-blue car my mom had coveted for a long time. Dad's plan was to arrive in Sunnyvale no more than two days later—to begin our new life.

The drive north turned out to be a typical Hart road trip, replete with squabbles and threats. We stopped in Solvang overnight to cool tempers.

Upon our arrival in the San Francisco Bay Area, we spent a few nights at a cheap motel along The El Camino (waiting for the van transporting our furniture), then moved to the Cherry Chase Garden Apartments. From there, we explored life outside the Los Angeles area.

That first summer consisted of orienting ourselves to our new environs. We visited the tourist spots of San Francisco—I

have special and vivid memories of Chinatown, Ghirardelli Square, and the ships of the Maritime Museum, including my little brothers and eleven-year-old me on the deck of the *Balclutha*—a nineteenth-century sailing vessel moored in the waters below Ghirardelli. Photographs of the day show us bundled in sweaters and scarves as if it were winter.

Daddy bought each of us inexpensive rods and reels (while Mom trussed us into thick sweatshirts so we wouldn't succumb to hypothermia) for a day of fishing from a pier in Half Moon Bay. Sardines were running (literally running into the loops of our fishing lines) that day. My brothers and I had a great time, managing to keep warm as well as bring home buckets of smelly little fish. Mom didn't know what to do with all of them—they were too small to clean and de-bone, and Betty Crocker didn't offer any sardine recipes. I think most of them made it back to the bay via the toilet. The apartment stunk for days.

Accustomed to the sunny sands and warm surf near Los Angeles, which we visited often, the beach at Santa Cruz was a disappointment. I had only to dip one toe into the water to know I didn't want to go there. Northern California's seas and coastal summer fog were chilly reminders that we weren't "home" any more.

A few miles south and inland, however, Santa Clara County was the land of Goldilocks' weather—just right. Even during summer, the place felt like spring. Northern California was lush with greenery and soft breezes and cool nights—a rarity in Granada Hills' summers.

The foliage of the apricot and cherry orchards that dotted

the County in the early 1960s was a refreshing shade of Kelly green (unlike the bleached silver of trees in Granada Hills). The Santa Cruz mountain range that cradled the valley of our new home was covered in evergreen pines and oaks. Even where trees were scarce, further south, the land was furred with golden grass that quickly turned green after the merest squall—as opposed to the perpetual grey-brown of Southern California’s stony crags. Northern California offered a fresh perspective on nature. Northern California offered a fresh perspective on a lot of things.

Our time in the apartment complex was brief, but the Hart boys didn’t skip a beat, amassing friends like marbles. Kids knocked on the door daily, asking for my brothers to come out to play—including one lad with a pronounced speech impediment. Scott had not left his all-inclusive values behind.

Despite my shyness, even I found friends—and was invited to roller-skating and birthday parties just as if I had known my new acquaintances a long time. The young Harts adapted well.

My parents finally decided upon a new forever home among a tract far different from the houses we’d known in Southern California—it was an Eichler, named for its designer. The distinctive modern and somewhat *avant-garde* architecture appealed to my dad’s jazz sensibilities, and the open floor plan and radiant heating appealed to Mom. The surrounding schools were among the best in the County, which pleased them both. After a seven-month stint in the tiny three-bedroom apartment, the Harts settled into a four-bedroom, two-bath house on Edmonton Avenue in Sunnyvale, California.

SANTA CLARA VALLEY HAD ONCE been a breadbasket. Well, a more accurate description might be a fruit basket. Downtown Sunnyvale flourished where once cherry orchards had grown (with plenty still around to provide a sufficient supply of the juicy fruits for the Olsen family's still-thriving cherry stands). Further south, in Campbell, were the remnants of prune orchards. The property surrounding Edmonton Avenue had been an apricot orchard decades ago—some trees had been left on each lot for the pleasure of the new owners. A quarter-acre orchard still occupied the corner of Wright and Homestead Avenues, separated from our street by a cinderblock wall, overgrown with ivy, on La Salle.

Three aging trees remained on the lot of our Edmonton house—and that first spring found the Harts inundated with apricots. We'd never known such abundance. The orange trees of Southern California had belonged to someone else—but these treats were ours.

Luckily we loved apricots. Soon Mom packed our cupboards and garage shelves with apricot jam, apricot butter, and canned fruit, while our freezer overflowed with frozen halves for later use and fresh fruit slices appeared for both lunch and dinner.

Mariani Packing Company, the local fruit giant, offered a service whereby regular citizens could dry their fruit haul. Located off one of the exit ramps from Interstate 280, acres of Mariani land had been equipped with open-air shelters (to protect drying fruit from dew or the occasional spring rain squall) and pallets.

The Harts rented several pallets that year, halving and pitting apricots as a family activity. Once the succulent half domes were laid out like inverted turtles, the Mariani crew added the

proper amount of sulfur to prevent browning. Then we left everything to dry. Three or four days later, our dried fruit was ready for pick-up.

Not before or since have I tasted such wonderful apricots in each of the incarnations Mom tried: fresh, canned, frozen, jellied, dried, in pies. There wasn't a single apricot recipe left unexplored—and they were all delicious.

As it turned out, the harvest of 1965 was a swan song. Never again did our personal orchard grace us with such abundance. Five years later, the trees had largely died.

As usual, Scott gathered more friends as soon as our furniture was in place. The Fernandez boys (all four of them) lived in the cul-de-sac across from our new residence. They, along with the children who lived on the corner (whose name escapes me) and another boy down the street, were among Scott's collection. He charmed the adults as well, befriending a bachelor engineer a few doors down and earning a special place in the hearts of the Bulls, who lived next door to the Fernandeses.

George and Ada Bull, along with their three daughters, had moved to Edmonton within a few months of the Harts. The eldest girl was older than me while the other two were both younger than Grant. Despite the lack of any perceivable common ground, however, Scott introduced himself (and eventually the rest of us) to the family. And, because of his utter acceptance of their middle daughter, Susie—who suffered from cerebral palsy—he ingratiated himself to the beleaguered Bulls within no time.

As he had done throughout his life, Scotty gave no special treatment to those with handicaps. He often dropped by the Bulls' after school for a visit and to help Ada with moving Susie in and out of her wheelchair when necessary, or simply visiting with the agile-minded child herself.

Unused to such ready acceptance of her daughter by other children—who usually stared, pointed, or ignored her—Ada was impressed that all of the Hart kids treated Susie's condition as nothing out of the ordinary. She once asked Mom if we had a handicapped child in our family (to which my mother apparently answered with an emphatic and thankful “no”), because of our calm reception of her little girl.

Ada soon hired me, and eventually Scott, to “babysit” when she needed a few hours’ break. She had never before trusted any youngster with the care of her daughter.

As usual, Scott’s friendships weren’t confined to Edmonton. Within the first few years of attendance at West Valley Elementary School, Scott not only made numerous pals, but started a rock band with a boy named Rick, one of the Fernandez kids, and a young man who was to become his new best buddy: Steve Kessler.

There were phone calls between Scott and Kelly for a time after our migration north, but the distance and hopelessness of a reunion had encouraged the boys to move on. For Scott, Steve filled the void left by the loss of Kelly.

Ten-year old Scott and Steve looked like brothers—blond, blue-eyed, good looking. The bond was strengthened when they learned their birthdays were only one day apart: Scott on March 25, Steve the day after. Scott was proud of being the elder of the two—and repeatedly reminded Steve of that.

Chapter 3

1966

ALONGSIDE ME, Scott developed an interest in The Beatles—but his passion ran to emulation rather than worship. He and I would load up the turntable and lip-synch to Beatles' tunes for hours, playing air guitars and characteristically emulating their movements (he was John while I was Paul). But by the time he entered sixth grade, he'd moved even further on—his rock band was covering Beatles tunes and other popular songs of the day in real time. They experimented with their own compositions as well.

The guitar confiscated from my father took on a new life with Scott. Although Grant and I were happy to strum chords and sing melodies, Scott began to pick out tunes and the riffs of his ever-broadening collection of idols. The fingertips of his left hand became calloused. He replaced the nylon strings with steel ones, to get a more modern tone from the unfortunate instrument. It sounded awful, but Scott's innate abilities shone nonetheless. That the old guitar would never sound like an electric one didn't stop him from rocking, and rocking well.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION WAS A requirement by the time I started attending junior high in 1964. The nation was becoming

more aware of the importance of physical movement to a child's welfare. The Kennedy Administration had pushed many initiatives to get children move active—and the Johnson Administration that followed didn't ease up on the requirements. Instead of the informal games of our earlier years in elementary school, like dodge ball and tetherball, swings and slides and rings, by 1964 even these lesser schools were compelling students to participate in organized sports or an entire hour of physical movement, regardless of abilities.

Scotty was a natural at all sports.

By his own admission, Kevin Loop had no such abilities. When he and Scott were in sixth grade, Kevin was an overweight child who had spent most of his life avoiding sweat. With the new health initiatives the government was touting, pushups and pull-ups and sit-ups became requirements at a time when Kevin could do none of those things.

To Kevin's fortune, he was partnered with Scott on the day their teacher demanded sit-ups followed by a class-wide announcement of each student's individual performance at the end of a timed sixty-second period. Petrified that he would be unable to do even one sit-up (and would have to make that public), Kevin begged his partner for a hand up. Scott reached out to the struggling child without drawing the attention of their teacher so that, at the end of the sixty seconds, Kevin was able to announce he'd completed four reps of the exercise. Although he considered that an embarrassingly low total, it was better than zero. And certainly better than others who, since they hadn't been helped, were picked on and subjected to harassment Kevin had avoided, thanks to my brother.

I wasn't to learn of this until I met Kevin in 2011 for the

first time. By that time, he was a slim, competitive and driven athlete. Although never close friends, Kevin credits Scotty's kindness that day in sixth grade for turning his attitude and focus around—kindness that wasn't soon forgotten, and which Kevin himself thereafter bestowed on others in similar straits.

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR existence as a family, the Harts began to plan vacations. Oh, we'd been on day trips occasionally, but a real vacation of any duration hadn't been tried—until Daddy discovered family camping.

My father loved to camp—but previously his forays into the wilderness had been to the Kern River under the guise of a “boy's week” with his stepfather, stepbrother, and Cousin Mickey. There they spent a week roughing it—no modern conveniences, no tents, no cook-stoves, no lanterns. Nothing but two men, two boys, their fishing rods, sleeping bags and whatever they could carry in packs on their backs. My dad loved it. They seldom came across another human being—and that was just as he liked it.

My mother hated camping. When she was young, her family explored much of the Western and Midwest United States, well-equipped with tents and cots and cooking utensils. They frequented campsites that offered rudimentary bathrooms with running water. However, despite the gorgeous surroundings to which they traveled, Mom still found these times unbearable. She was left with sour images of hours with her hated father and his infernal camera, as her mom “wasted” the day fishing.

Still, with a family of five, camping was the only activity my

parents could think of (and afford, as I came to know later) to occupy the vacation days my dad earned each year.

So we camped.

We started with a tent, a lantern, a stove, and sleeping bags. Those were more than the “essentials” Dad had needed on the Kern. However, that left Mom cooking on the ground (because we didn’t visit those crowded campgrounds that had picnic tables) while we kids fetched water from a nearby (sort of) hose bib. The bathrooms were the portable chemical kinds. The ground was hard and stony. Nobody (except perhaps Daddy) was happy.

One of the first such sojourns was to a lake called Nacimiento, with its vast stretches of treeless dirt shoreline. Located approximately halfway between our new Northern California home and our old neighborhood, there we met up with the Morrows and the Wings from Index Street.

Fortunately, our old neighbors were seasoned campers. Not only were the Harts able to borrow stuff we hadn’t thought to buy or bring, but we learned how camping should be done.

Thereafter, with each subsequent vacation, our camping-related stash grew—camp tables, cots, windbreaks, food-storage bins, and all manner of conveniences were purchased and stored for the next go-around. We became seasoned, too.

That still didn’t endear camping to my mom, however. Soon she could cook and wash dishes and tidy up more conveniently—but those were tasks she was already doing at home in a more conducive environment. Camping was no vacation for Mom—it was all of the work without the perks. Plus, she had to endure an endless supply of dirt.

As kids, we had it better than Mom, but not by much. We

helped with the chores of dishwashing and trash removal and “policing” the campsite to remove unwanted cigarette butts from the premises. I didn’t smoke (although, unbeknownst to me, my brothers were already at it), so I considered this butt patrol an unfair and filthy task better left to those who had caused the mess. My protests went unheeded.

There were higher points, however. The Morrows owned a boat, and once we learned to waterski, we were hooked. Even Mom liked boating and was thrilled watching her brood show off on skis.

In our second year of camping, along with an ever-growing cache of camping equipment, Daddy raided our family’s meager savings and bought an Evinrude Gull-Wing Hull ski boat. The Harts were in heaven. Dad loved the way the boat handled. Mom was especially pleased with the safety record of the craft. If given the choice, Mom would not have opted for such an expensive thing as a boat—but, lucky for us, Daddy hadn’t consulted with her on the purchase.

The Harts took to the water like ducks. And, true to form, Scott was the best among us at the waterskiing game. He graduated from two to a single ski in one season. He was strong and graceful, easily jumping the wake, sailing over swells formed by passing crafts, changing direction so sharply that his shoulder nearly touched the water as he turned, using only one hand to hold onto the tow rope at every opportunity. As with any athletic endeavor he turned his mind to, Scott was spectacular—adept, quick, and fearless. Daddy, Grant, and I would all become accomplished skiers, but we never matched Scott’s speed or agility, and rarely took the risks he did.

For the next few years, I endured the extra work around

the campsite with less protest. Skiing and boating were how summers were meant to pass.

Our move to Edmonton seemed nearly ideal for all parties. We had discovered a new family activity; Dad's job looked to be stable; Mom was content with her new surroundings and gained some additional freedom with the purchase of a second car (a used Corvair my dad drove to work). We began to tease her about her fondness for the Thunderbird, calling her beloved car the Thunder Chicken and bestowing her with an affectionate nickname: Roaring Chicken (after a character on the TV series *F Troop*). She didn't seem to mind at all. She always was more bark than bite and, I supposed, was resigned that her kids had found her out.

Grant settled into school and was making friends. I was managing my way through shyness and puberty with minimal disruption. Scott continued to impress everyone outside the family with his charm and confident nature. By the time he entered junior high, he was earning regular money with a paper route. His grades continued to be mediocre, but that seemed only a minor issue.

Chapter 4

1967

AS WITH MOST NEIGHBORHOODS, Edmonton Avenue couldn't hide its secrets. Before long, we learned who was upset with whom and whose kids were having difficulties in school. Most troubling, however, were the minor burglaries that had begun to occur.

My parents didn't take long to put the puzzle pieces together. The burglaries had transpired while the victims were vacationing. Those families had stopped their newspaper service during these anticipated absences. That meant the friendly neighborhood paperboy knew exactly when the homes would be vacant. That meant Scott.

Even before that, Mom knew Scotty hadn't left his past behind. Soon after our move, following an afternoon with a new-found friend, Carol, Mom received a phone call. Her friend was on the line, asking if Mom had found some money on the floor after her visit. Five dollars was missing from Carol's purse. My mom had not—and told Carol so—but her suspicions were aroused.

After news of the neighborhood break-ins reached us, a quick examination of Scott's room turned up some new objects that were outside the normal scope of a twelve-year-old boy, even if that boy had an allowance and a part-time job. Odd and

ends my parents had never seen before were found—including incongruous things, like ladies' underwear recognizable as belonging neither to me or Mom.

Confronted with the findings in his room, Scott confessed to my parents, thereby losing his right to continue with the newspaper job and enduring a session with The Belt. Perhaps not as obvious, he had further eroded my parents' hope for his redemption.

Through it all, the family maintained a code of silence. The Harts didn't air their dirty laundry in public—no one outside of our household was to know about Scott. The veil of top secrecy with which my dad had lived for so many years because of his job was cast over everyone. Daddy didn't discuss his son with his acquaintances or work colleagues. Mom was silent with her friends—she confided only to Mamo, dredging memories of her thieving father into the fray. Grant would have kept Scott's secrets even had he not been compelled by my parents, for he loved him.

By that time, I didn't talk about my brother with anyone—I had no desire. He and I had stopped physically fighting and rarely disagreed with one another, but his misbehaviors and my maturation were taking its toll on us as siblings. I loved him, but I was finding it harder and harder to like him.

DESPITE OUR EFFORTS, I suppose it was inevitable that Scott's pilfering would be discovered by someone outside the family. Still, when the phone call came, we were surprised.

A Sunnyvale Public Safety Officer was on the line. He was calling from the local Ace Hardware store, a couple of miles

down the road. Both of my brothers (and another boy named Phil) were with him. They had been caught attempting to steal fishing gear. My parents' presence was requested.

On the far side of the elementary school was (and still is) one of Santa Clara County's many small waterways—Stevens Creek. An oasis amid the city—not far from home, but a world away—the creek was a quiet and peaceful place where my brothers and their friends rode bikes, waded in its waters, threw stones, and built forts. Occasionally they contracted rashes from the poison oak there, but that didn't stop them. I visited to write poetry and sketch. Once there, only the distant roar of road noise informed us that we were still among civilization.

Small trout populated the creek—and the boys were set on catching some. That the Hart boys already owned rudimentary rods and reels (supplied by my father for our earlier sojourn to Half Moon Bay) didn't seem to matter. More probably, "fishing" was an excuse—ten-year-old Grant's story to the police officer was that Scott had suggested they "steal something." That meant anything.

No charges were filed that day, although an incident report was submitted as normal protocol. I'm sure the hardware-store manager was inclined to let the matter slide because the boys were young, the theft had been thwarted, and no real harm had been done.

My Dad was less forgiving. He ordered my brothers to ride their bikes home—they could manage the few miles without any assistance from my parents—warning in a clear, precise tone that The Belt would be waiting for them both at the end of their journey.

Grant was blubbering, “No Daddy, no Daddy, no” even before the first strike. His remorse was palpable. He never again attempted shoplifting after this harrowing brush with the police and The Belt.

Scott took his punishment without a whimper or tear, or any word of remorse or repentance.

Given Scott’s outward indifference, my dad’s rage guided his hand that day. He later confessed to my mom that the lashes had ultimately been staid by fear. His anger had been so great he feared he might lose control and kill his son.

Thereafter, Daddy refused to use The Belt or raise his hand to any of his children.

IN OCTOBER, THE FERNANDEZ home was burglarized while the family was out of town. Thanks to some good investigative work by then-Lieutenant Alex Michaelis (who would later go on to be the city’s Police Commander), the crime was quickly solved. All clues led to Scott.

The imperative to solve the crime may have had a little help. The City of Sunnyvale elects their councilmembers and, on a rotating basis, one of those officials serves a term as mayor. In 1967, our neighbor (and the father of Scotty’s friends) Judge William Fernandez was the then-current mayor of Sunnyvale. Naturally, a burglary at the mayor’s home was cause for more than a cursory investigation, no matter the pettiness of the theft.

Given the proximity of this latest burglary to our house, coupled with the recent incident report about the Ace Hardware shoplifting attempt, the police knocked on our door.

Questions were asked, fingerprints were matched, and burglary charges were leveled against Scott. As with the previous break-ins on the block (which the police now connected with Scott as well), the items taken were insubstantial—coins, odds-and-ends, women's underclothes, etc.—but the circumstances of their occurrence couldn't be ignored. The burglaries had been carefully planned to coincide with absences. These were not random, impulsive, childish acts.

Scotty received probation from the Sunnyvale courts. When he was caught again a year later for another burglary, the probation continued and he was ordered to undergo a program of family counselling until such time as his probation officer deemed it no longer necessary.

"No longer necessary" wasn't going to happen for a while.

As far as my father was concerned, referral to a psychologist was the ultimate insult. There was nothing wrong with his son that maturity wouldn't cure. Scott was a smart, stubborn, and willful child, but he was guilty of nothing worse than anything my Dad had done in his day. In Daddy's opinion, psychiatrists were for crazy people, not high-spirited boys—and families should be accorded the privacy and privilege of handling such issues their own way. My father refused to take time off of work to talk to some nutcase doctor who was probably crazy himself. He attended none of the joint meetings the doctor requested.

Mom did.

Scott had been to several sessions with the counsellor before the parent conference was requested. But, given doctor-patient confidentiality privileges, my parents knew nothing of what Scott had been telling him—they would never know the content of these discussions. What that meant was that Mom was

blindsided by the doctor's initial and startling approach. His first question for her was, "Do you ever get dirty?"

My mother was a proud woman who refused to be seen away from her house without full (but subtle) makeup, hair coiffed, and clothes impeccably assembled. There would be no random viewings of hair-rollers. I don't think she owned a pair of jeans. Despite this, however, she scrubbed floors and sweated to ensure her house was as immaculate as my father demanded. She may never have been seen in her work clothes/work state except by her children—not even Daddy got to see her "dirty"—but that didn't mean she wasn't filthy a great deal of the time.

Mom responded to the doctor with a curt "Of course I do" and nothing more. She interpreted the question as an accusation—that Scotty (and, therefore, the doctor) thought she was overly concerned with the state of her house and self, thus neglecting the wellbeing and happiness of her son. She never, however, requested clarification. She was angry with the question and the doctor. And nobody locks anger away for a rainy day better than my mom—unless you count her mother.

Mamo and the hated Byron (my thieving grandfather) had divorced early in my life. Even decades thereafter, however, my grandmother treated the subject of her ex-husband with unrivaled bitterness. When my little brother's only son, Bryan Grant, came into the world (thirty years after her divorce), Mamo had an apoplectic fit. First, she mistakenly heard the name as "Byron." However, even after her audio error was rectified, she *ordered* my brother to change the name—"Bryan," especially spelled with a "y," was too like that of *he-who-must-not-be-named* for her taste.

Mamo eventually came to adore Bryan (“y” retained) as much as she did the other boys in her life, but for a while, venom was spewed.

My mom doesn’t let go of past hurts and disappointments and fears any better than her own mother did. The mention of Grandpa Byron’s name still brings a vitriolic response from my mother. When, years later, I framed some of his incredible black-and-white photographs of the family farm in Iowa, taken in 1944, to hang in my office, Mom wasn’t pleased. Only grudgingly (and with constant prompting from me) did she acknowledge their artistry.

The fact that she still remembers the “Do you ever get dirty?” question with such clarity and disdain, fifty years after the fact, is the only proof I need of Mom’s penchant for emotional hoarding. In fact, this question is the only part of that or any subsequent session with Scott’s counselor that Mom remembers to this day.

Chapter 5

1968

SCOTT'S THIEVING WENT UNABATED—and my family became trapped in a cycle of catch-and-release. For another year after the second arrest, Scott was repeatedly charged and remanded to the custody of my parents together with court-issued instructions to continue counselling. He didn't spend a day in jail.

Instead, my parents were the ones imprisoned. With The Belt foresworn, they resorted to non-corporal punishments like withholding his guitar, denying him special privileges, groundings, demanding he be home at certain times, and tracking his movements and behavior as well as anyone could in the age before cell phones and electronic devices. He lost his right to privacy—my parents searched his bedroom regularly, justifying their actions with “as long as you live under our roof ...”

Nothing changed. They had the responsibility, but none of the control.

My mom's frustration became palpable and verbal. Where once she wouldn't divulge her feelings to anyone, she relaxed that rule each time Scott was arrested or otherwise discovered in his misdeeds. When Scott was in trouble, Grant and I knew it, together with details of new and past crimes. Nothing was kept from my little brother and me anymore. We became

Mom's co-secret bearers—my mom could no longer endure such knowledge alone. I didn't blame her.

Although he doled out and supported Scott's punishments, Daddy continued to maintain that he'd done a lot worse when he was Scott's age—and still refused to meet with the counsellor.

Scotty was stoic, unfazed by the additional attention and attempts to curtail his freedom.

Eventually, my parents were to realize how little impact they had on their eldest son when they received yet another phone call from the police after midnight—the very day he'd been grounded for an infraction.

Scott and Steve Kessler had been found together at Serra Park. Scott had climbed out his bedroom window.

Fortunately, no crime had been committed this time—just two young boys out after curfew. But the police were well-acquainted with Scott—and didn't want a crime on their hands.

My parents retrieved the boys, and their bikes, and took them home. They contemplated installing bars on Scott's windows but did nothing about it. In fact, following that night, even Scott's groundings ceased. My parents no longer threatened to take away Scott's guitar or other privileges. They had given up. Scott was uncontrollable and uncontrolled.

Instead, Daddy worked longer days and focused on home projects during his off hours, taking his normal great care with vehicle maintenance and construction undertakings, methodically sorting nuts and bolts and screws and nails into tiny compartments for future use, and general tidying his already immaculate workspace.

Mom resorted to silent rages, peppered with sarcastic

remarks about her eldest son to any member of the family close enough to listen. I became her confidante, learning more details of Scott's previous misbehavior (including the underwear fetish), hearing stories of her life, her childhood, her dashed hopes and shelved dreams. I became more like her best friend than her daughter and was emboldened by this new status to ask questions.

"Were you and Daddy fighting when Scotty was born?" She seemed surprised that I knew this, believing that she had kept the worst of it secret. I assured her that she had not—not then, not ever.

So she told me. I was to learn of my father's philandering and her overwhelming sense of helplessness. According to Mom, Daddy had never ceased his affair with one particular woman (whose name was tattooed on his bicep during his stint in the Marines, hastily covered with the head of a panther prior to his marriage to Mom). During each of her first two pregnancies, she suspected him of being particularly active in his outside sexual pursuits. Eventually, she became perpetually suspicious—but had hardened herself to the possibility. She told my father he could do as he pleased as long as he didn't bring home some disease—if she caught something, she'd have his ass.

I didn't believe a word of her indifference—hurt and pain and anger bubbled up between the words. Mom was never good at hiding her feelings. Like my brother's behavior, she was stymied as to how to corral my father, and vulnerable in her realization that she had three kids, no job, no marketable skills, and—perhaps the most crushing—not even her former figure.

IN HINDSIGHT, I doubt Scott's misdeeds were widespread knowledge outside our household, at least at first. Even inside the Hart home, months would go by when nothing went amiss, lulling us, raising our expectations for peace and calm. To maintain the harmony, we kept our silence. The Harts knew well how to keep secrets.

As with most teenage girls, I distanced myself from my brother. However, my detachment was more of an imperative than normal growing pains. I wanted nothing to do with this boy I couldn't trust. I was embarrassed to be his sister, even if no one else knew the things I did about him. His rifling of my underwear drawer became commonplace—and I came to understand that the dream I'd had on Index Street, where someone had been in my room and rummaged in my dresser, had been no dream. He'd been at this behavior since the age of five. My parents hadn't been able to curb his activities then or any time since. He didn't seem to be responding to the counselling at all. I couldn't stop him—so I ignored him.

Scott's antics, however, did nothing to diminish his popularity with anyone other than my parents and me. He towed my little brother, numerous male buddies, and several smitten little girls in his charismatic wake. He even had a steady girlfriend at an age when few of the other boys could make such a claim. The relationships were surprisingly long-lasting.

GRANT AND I RAN AWAY FROM HOME one spring afternoon. We didn't get far. We hadn't planned on getting far—I was in sandals and both of us were without jackets or a penny in our pockets.

Our real purpose was to make a point—we were unhappy that Mom and Dad enforced the rules with us while ignoring their application to Scott. Grant had an even deeper lament—any mishap on his part was followed by “You’re just like your brother” from Mom. His protests of “I’m not Scott” fell on stone. Given her history with her own father, her husband, and her eldest son, Mom had developed a mistrust of all males—and her youngest son suffered as a result of such scars.

Following an absence of several hours, Grant and I returned home well after dark. When I explained our grievances to Mom and Dad, my parents wept and nodded and apologized—and went right on behaving as they had before. If Grant and I benefited from a less-strident structure in our lives, or an expansion of trust, neither of us noticed.

Scott continued to do as he pleased.

TROUBLE AT HOME DIDN’T impact the family vacations. Our camping adventures led us finally to a place called Point McCloud on Shasta Lake in Northern California. It was there that the Harts first met the James Gang.

We had ceased going south for our adventures, preferring the dense wooded environs of Northern California instead. Lakes Berryessa, Calero, and New Hogan Dam, among others, became regular summer camping and boating destinations for the Harts.

Dad had befriended the patriarch of the James Gang, Dave, at Lockheed, where he (a former law enforcement officer) worked in the security department. From then on, at least one of our camping trips each year was a joint venture with Dave’s

large family. Lake Shasta's Point McCloud was a favorite destination of the James family and was soon added to the Harts' repertoire.

For my brothers, finding friends among the James children wasn't hard—there were six from which to choose. Dave Junior was Scott's age. Then there was Tony, Steven, Kim (the only girl), followed by the twins, Jordan and Lance.

For my parents, having the camaraderie of Jeanne and Dave—the heads of the clan—was special. Dad and Dave had in common the secrecy their jobs demanded, Mom and Jeanne had the familiar lament of mothers with rowdy children. On the camping trips, the adults could relax and fill themselves with cheer and a Mai Tai or two (or more) as the kids explored the wilderness of Shasta County—remote caves and pristine creeks. We skied, mostly. The boys fished. I experienced my first serious crush on a young man who worked at the resort—and who returned the interest.

Family life for the Harts seemed normal for a time—or at least the closest thing that I knew to what normal might be. We always looked the part anyway, to the outside world.

Chapter 6

1969

GET-RICH-QUICK SCHEMES had never been attractive to my father—he was a hard worker and proud to be so. But lucrative alternatives to his career at Lockheed were often on his mind. He tried his hand at various business ventures through the years to satisfy the desire to make a better life for his family and himself. Or perhaps it was simply a desire to escape the confines of life as he'd come to know it.

None of Daddy's investments worked out well. The taxes on a land investment in Southern California forced the sale of some property long before its anticipated value bloom. His interest in founding a music-recording company didn't get far once we moved north (because the pop and jazz music industry was concentrated in Los Angeles). The wildly popular introduction of pantyhose ruined any chance of success for a glue-like substance, gentle to the skin, that held nylon stockings firmly in place without the need for garter belts—boxes of which remained neatly stacked in our garage for years.

Still, he hoped. His job at Lockheed, with its many secrets, had ceased to be a source of satisfaction. He wanted something else.

In 1969, Daddy invested in his most ambitious endeavor to date. And, unlike previous endeavors, purchase of the

candy-and-ice-cream store in San Jose involved the entire Hart family.

Soon after our move to Edmonton Avenue, Mom had taken a part-time job, working for an answering service (in an age well before the advent of answering machines, cell phones, and voicemail systems). Her kids were in school. She had free time. The family could use the money—when can't families use extra money? She wanted to contribute, but still be home to send us off in the mornings and greet us after school.

Mom loved the freedom of a job. She'd opted for motherhood over career at one time and now, with her children needing less attention (or outright rejecting such attention, in one case), she wanted something more satisfying in much the same way my dad did. The answering service may not have been a career, but it was pleasant, the hours were perfect, and she was good at it ("She gives good voice," as my father once said).

At fifteen, I went to work for a local variety store called White Front for the summer, buying my own school clothes with the earnings and getting accustomed to wriggling my toes in the adult world. Although they seldom discussed the family finances, I knew my parents were strapped most of the time. The way I looked at it, taking care of my personal expenses eased their burden a little.

The purchase of the candy store changed the job situation for all of us. As soon as the business became a Hart possession, Mom was called upon to use her pleasant speaking voice to greet customers, and her ample kitchen skills (she'd always been a good cook) to make specialty candies, caramel corn, and whatever other sweet treats she could dream up. She applied

competent organizational skills to keep the books in order and the place stocked with supplies and finished products (she'd always been the family accountant). And we three kids could work the counter during the summer months, on weekends, and after school, compensated at minimum wage for our time. We'd be contributing to the family welfare—and Scott would be under near-constant parental supervision.

As a bonus for all of that responsibility, Mom's name would be emblazoned in lights above the shop: *Jeri's Confections*.

That any of us might not have wanted this life didn't matter to Daddy. He had a goal.

I THINK OF MY DAD as a man of his time—sort of. When I talk to others who were born in the 1950s, there is a common description of our fathers: they were the stoic breadwinners of the family. Middle-class moms of baby boomers commonly stayed home, taxed with the emotional development of their children and the needs of the households. The dads brought home the paycheck and seldom interacted with their kids, except sometimes with sports, or to provide sage advice and dole out punishments demanded as a result of the threat, "Wait 'til your father gets home." Dads made the big decisions in the family. That's how it was supposed to work—just watch any rerun of *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best* or *Leave it to Beaver*.

That real life didn't always support these stereotypes didn't help. Those early television shows are among the first sitcoms—with an emphasis on the "com." Oh, the Harts had

some of the comedy in their lives (and my brothers' baby books are filled with anecdotes that made us all giggle), but underneath the laughter were some terrible truths.

Dad had been born on his mother's sixteenth birthday in the first full year of The Great Depression: 1930. His mom and dad were barely married at the time. They would divorce two years later, leaving my grandmother Cecelia (who we would call Mimi) free to revert to wild-child status, abandoning the raising of her first-born to foster-care parents or Dad's maternal grandmother (who had a child of her own, only a few months older than my dad). Cecelia's *fourth* marriage (to the wonderful man I was to call Grampy), came when she was twenty-seven and my father was eleven. Although perhaps too late, this marriage to Grampy finally accorded Daddy a modicum of stability and a good role model for fatherhood. But that didn't change the circumstances surrounding Dad's crucial early years—years he wouldn't talk about to anybody. "That's all past," he would say, skirting the pain. Only once did he divulge to my mother details of an incident with "the woman I lived with," as he called his then-foster mother. He'd been stricken with diarrhea and hadn't adequately cleaned himself up or taken care not to clog the toilet. The resultant beating had been brutal. He had been four years old.

Given few positive parental experiences to fall back on, Dad learned about the role of father as dictated by the times—with-out a true-to-life role foundation, without a net.

I WAS LUCKY. After we moved to Northern California and prior to my senior year, my attendance at any school wasn't

simultaneous with either of my brothers. Therefore, I wasn't tainted by association.

That changed in my senior year when Homestead High School met my freshman brother Scott.

Scott and high school did well together at first. He made the junior-varsity football team as a running back (a thrill for both him and my dad—football was their favorite sport). Dad attended all of Scotty's home games, cheering him on and marveling at, bragging about, and praising Scott for his natural ability (albeit not to the boy—my father believed that pride in one's children was a given and didn't need to be expressed to them directly). The first semester, Scotty brought home his first A since elementary school. True, it was for physical education, but it was an A.

As it turned out, one of his junior varsity coaches was also my history teacher that year—Mr. Peasley.

One day late in the football season Mr. Peasley approached me in the school hallway and asked “Hey, what's with that brother of yours?”

I didn't know how to respond. What did he mean? Did he know about Scott's larcenous behavior? Was he asking why my brother wouldn't pay attention in class? Why he was always late or absent? Why he smoked when he was supposed to be an athlete? What was his fascination with ladies' underwear?

I didn't ask for clarification. I bowed my head, mumbled, “I don't know,” and walked away.

Mr. Peasley might have gotten more of an answer than he bargained for by my behavior that day. What more proof did he need that the Hart children were weird?

The fact that he'd asked in the middle of the hallway—and

not some private office where a serious conversation might have been possible—should have cued me to the innocence of his question. But the query was too loaded, and I was too mortified about being Scott’s sister. I assumed the worst. I had long ago learned to assume the worst when it came to Scott.

Mr. Peasley never broached the subject again, even in passing.

SCOTT AND GRANT HAD BEEN stealing cigarettes from my parents since they were twelve and nine years old, respectively. Seldom were the stolen packs missed. Mom and Dad went through several cartons each week on their own—my dad himself smoked three packs per day. And considering that the house and our clothes perpetually smelled of cigarette smoke, few suspected that the odor surrounding my brothers was anything other than secondhand.

My Dad caught them once—and forced each to eat a cigarette (minus the filter) in an effort to curb their appetite. Smoking was a nasty habit, counselled Mom and Dad as they puffed away.

Luckily, the tobacco meal didn’t kill them—it could have, although my parents didn’t know that at the time. Grant vomited. Scott was stoic. Only later did Grant learn that Scott hadn’t swallowed, which accounted for a lot. The lesson went unheeded—they both continued to smoke.

I suppose it was inevitable that cigarettes weren’t the only smoking pleasures my brothers discovered. The ivy-covered wall along La Salle, at the end of our street, was a perfect hiding place for cigarettes, lighters, joints. The availability of drugs to ever-younger children was becoming the norm

in the 1960s. My brothers made themselves available for the experience.

Mom and Dad didn't learn about the marijuana until years later. I can only guess what they would have done had they known. Of course, forcing them to eat weed wouldn't have been considered much of a punishment by the boys.

FOR A TIME, Daddy and Scott's relationship improved and it seemed that Daddy may have been right about Scott only needing time to mature.

In addition to their common bond of football, cars brought them closer together. As Daddy puttered in the garage, Scott began to join him, offering to help and asking questions about engine maintenance. It was a cautious dance, for my father was very particular with his tools and the work that was to be done on anything. My dad insisted that everything be spotless and perfect—car maintenance, cabinet construction, home repair, everything. His projects took far longer to complete than for most people because he was so exacting.

Still, sometimes joined by Steve, Dad taught Scott everything he knew about cars, using our newly acquired, slightly used 1965 Ford Mustang as a test bed.

Daddy was no less stringent with his expectations during these lessons than he was about any other project in his life, but he practiced patience as the youngsters absorbed his knowledge. Steve may have had an extra incentive to learn about cars, since his mom owned a highly coveted red Chevy Super Sport Impala convertible. Between that and the Mustang, Daddy had the boys' attention.

In the 1960s, California public schools offered driver's education classes. In the semester when a student became old enough to get a temporary driver's permit, one compulsory class was devoted to teaching the art of driving—and scaring sense into us with horrific films about the ramifications of distracted or impaired driving.

The films worked on me. I took the class when I was fifteen but had not been interested enough in piloting a weapon of mass destruction to get my license. I was nearly twenty before I became a licensed driver.

Scott, on the other hand, was more than keen on the concept and freedom of driving. Nothing scared him. The second he could qualify, he applied for the temporary permit. He begged to drive my parent's cars at every opportunity. He couldn't wait.

Actually, I learned later that he didn't wait. Several times prior to earning his license, Scott and Steve pried their way into the driver's education classroom after dark, snatching the keys of a departmental car and joy-riding to the beach at Santa Cruz. On those few occasions when the vehicle's tank wasn't full, they used a bilge pump to syphon gas from another car. They were resourceful if nothing else.

The boys accomplished the Santa Cruz trip in record time, too. After accounting for playtime at the Santa Cruz end, the treacherous journey over Highway 17 *and back* for the boys totaled little more than an hour. At the speed limit, fifty-five minutes should have equaled a one-way trip only.

The school authorities were none the wiser. Without a recording of mileage and gas consumption on a regular basis (which apparently wasn't done), the lads were never discovered in their nefarious endeavors.

The boys had a lot in common: their age, their good looks, the rock band and their love of music, girls, and a fascination with cars. Over the duration of their friendship, Scotty tried to recruit Steve for more than midnight powwows and joyrides. Although not above sneaking out after dark to join Scotty for pranks and a smoke, Steve drew the line at participating in Scott's burglary business. He might even have enjoyed a panty raid once in a while, but something about the depth of Scott's fascination with lacy undergarments went beyond Steve's comfort level. Scott had once broken into Steve's house—witnessed but reported only to Steve, who told me years later. When Steve confronted him, Scott admitted to pleasuring himself on Steve's elder sister's bed with her own undergarments. Steve found that creepy.

Still, Scott remained his best friend. Being with Scott was exciting.

Chapter 7

1971

WHO WAS A PUP when Scott brought her home. That was her name: Who. One of Scott's favorite songs at that time was *Me and You and a Dog Named Boo* by Lobo. He had misheard the dog's name, opting for "Who" instead.

The Harts already had a female cat named Herself and two brother cats named You and Me. I suppose Who was an inevitable choice, contributing to the convoluted conversations the family had about our pets. A *Who's on First* of our own design.

Who was a black German Shepherd mix with a tiny white blaze on her chest. She was devoted to my brother—and he to her. When he could, he took her everywhere—even on his late-night escapes.

Mamo had come to live with us, too. Recently retired from her longtime job at the phone company, when Daddy asked for her help at the candy store, she agreed. He promised her meals, a room of her own (the boys bunked together), and a little "mad" money on the side, when the store could afford it. Her pension would be hers to save or spend as she saw fit. All that was needed was that she be a partner to my mom, keeping the candy store open and running and healthy.

He hadn't consulted Mom first, but she was happy to have

the assistance, especially since Dad was going to be traveling again for his job.

Mamo was a natural. She became adept at making caramel apples, chocolate haystacks and bark, and other gooey concoctions. She was far better at it than Mom, whose caustic body chemistry brought the butterfat to the top of any chocolate she touched, causing it to mottle. A swirl of white butterfat on chocolate never looks appealing.

Once Mamo took over the candy-making, Mom was free to greet customers and run the business side of Jeri's Confections. The arrangement suited them both—Mom liked the public interaction while Mamo preferred the anonymity of the backroom.

IN 1971 I WAS IN JUNIOR COLLEGE. My grades in high school had been excellent (mostly As), but not outstanding enough to warrant a scholarship. Since my parents hadn't planned on or saved for college (for any of us), I wasn't going anywhere special. Besides, I had no idea what I wanted to be when I grew up—and I figured a four-year college was too expensive for the undecided.

I enrolled as an English major. However, while fulfilling the prerequisites during my first year, I discovered the lure of psychology. My initial attraction was to the fascinating complexity of the human mind, but psychology also offered a chance for me to explore the dynamics of my own family. "Where did we go wrong with Scotty?" was a common lament from my mother. Perhaps psychology would simultaneously provide me with that answer and a career.

At that time, I viewed Scott in much the same way Mom did—an unpredictable menace too often sucking the joy from our lives. We couldn't count on him to behave, to be around when needed, to respect our personal property or the property of others. When the phone rang at night, the police were too often on the other end. Mom had already caught Scott's hand in the candy-store till. Her frustrations ran deep—and I felt the same.

The discussions between my mother and me over the years led to a deep friendship—closer than anything my own friends had with their mothers. Mom and I talked about more than just Scott. She told me stories about my dad: his neglect as a child, his stint in the Marines, his philandering, any tidbit of family lore, good or bad. She confided her dreams and disappointments, her unrequited aspirations as a fashion designer, her likes and dislikes in much the way she would have with a peer. I reciprocated. She heard a young teenager's dreams and hopes and desires as well, like any true friend.

Her disclosures did nothing to dampen my love for Dad—he may have been a terrible husband, but I knew him only as a quiet and intimidating man who I adored and feared at the same time. Her pain and disappointments moved me, but didn't move me away from my father. Her hurts were not mine.

Her opinion of Scott, however, was easy to assume as my own. My dislike and distrust of him mounted each day.

My obsession with psychology grew following discussions with Mom. What had gone wrong with my brother, and why?

I had another motive, separate from the understanding I wanted for my parents' sake. I wanted a guarantee. I wanted assurance that any child of mine wouldn't visit heartache on our

family as Scott had done. If there was a cause for his behavior, I wanted to know what it was—and ensure that it didn't creep into my own future household. I was hopeful that the study of psychology held the key, the answer to the overwhelming sadness that pervaded my house and my heart.

DESPITE THE FACT THAT she was largely Scott's dog, when Who was killed, we all suffered.

She had been itching to chase our cats through the house all morning, much to the displeasure of my mom. That night, while on a walk with my brother, she dashed after a strange cat into the middle of Homestead Road and was struck by a car.

The driver of the car stopped and offered to help Scott get the dying dog to an emergency vet. Unfortunately, the only one he knew was several miles away in Palo Alto. Once there, the vet could do nothing for the dog.

Scotty returned home in tears.

Once learning of the poor dog's fate, Daddy insisted that we retrieve Who's body immediately, fearing the vet would simply dispose of her without ceremony. For Daddy that was unacceptable. My father revered animals. Animals were as loved as people in the Hart family—sometimes, it seemed, more so. Scott's Who was to be buried properly, surrounded by those who loved her. All of us.

We drove the fifteen miles to the Palo Alto vet that night smothered in grief. The miles to our destination seemed to drag on—much as they must have for the injured Who.

"No wonder she died," was Mom's careless contribution to our sorrow.

Chapter 8

1972

I DON'T BELIEVE THAT unhappiness is inherited, but I do believe it is contagious.

When I was nineteen, I moved out of the contaminated zone. I'd had enough of the drama of home. I would miss the security my folks provided and the cherished camaraderie of my mom, but it was time. I was old enough to be on my own. It was getting crowded in the Edmonton house anyway, what with Mom, Dad, the two boys, my grandmother, her awful parrot Rocky, plus our own menagerie (we'd picked up two big dogs by that time, and still had two cats).

I was prepared: I had bedroom furniture, a plethora of kitchen utensils and gadgets, and other household goods purchased with my meager earnings or received as gifts in anticipation of my ultimate emancipation. A few months back, I'd accepted a full-time job in Redwood City as a secretary, leaving my days at the candy store and other odd jobs behind. I'd finally taken the test for my driver's license and bought myself a car.

Still a few credits shy of an AA, I was stalled in college. The psychology degree I coveted required completion of a class dedicated to reproducing the experiments of B.F. Skinner. To complete the course meant that I had to administer negative reinforcement on laboratory rats.

Skinner's experiments are famous in psychology circles, their importance and results touted in every psych book available, painstakingly detailed in description. I had studied their impact for nearly two years. I understood perfectly what the effects of reinforcement (of any kind) were likely to be. I didn't want to replicate brutal experiments on the innocent. I didn't think I needed to.

The school didn't agree. My degree from De Anza—earned a bit later than planned—would eventually be in Liberal Arts. I refused to take that final psychology class.

I was less disappointed at being denied the psych degree than I was about not having gleaned an answer to Scott. By that time I was moderately versed in the symptoms of psychoses and neuroses, child development, and behavioral science, and the all-important nature-versus-nurture arguments. I was familiar with misbehavior often associated with middle children like Scott. I'd studied the dynamics of a preschool class and conducted experiments verifying Piaget's cognitive development theories (without having to resort to negative reinforcement, thank you very much). I received As for my efforts (except in statistics—which was just another math class, to my way of thinking. I was terrible at math).

Scott, however, remained an enigma. He didn't fit neatly into any of the “-oses” categories. Even when I accounted for degrees thereof, he didn't display an overwhelming number of the characteristics associated with any of them. His status as a middle child (together with the family drama surrounding Grant's birth) could have accounted for some of his problems. But I knew lots of middle children—their issues didn't compare with my brother's. His misconduct was radical, intermittent,

without apparent patterns or triggers. I couldn't pigeonhole him.

Given our common childhood, I was confident I knew what his home environment had been like: we didn't have excess, but we never lacked for essentials and, in fact, might have been assumed to be privileged. We all operated under the same rules and values and punishments—at least until our teenage years, when Scott got the better treatment, at least from what Grant and I could see. And yet, although not angels, Grant and I were nothing like Scott. As a result, I was dismissive of “nurture” as the cause of Scotty’s problems.

He looked different enough from Grant and me to raise my suspicion of some genetic aberration—the “blue-eyed kleptomaniac” gene (as if there were such a thing). But no one in the family, on either side (except the lone thieving maternal grandfather) seemed to have Scott’s light-fingered propensity—and I knew, with genetics, it usually takes two to tackle the recessive-gene tango.

Every psychology course I started held the promise of discovery. Every class I completed carried me closer to a degree but left me short of the answer to my most overriding questions. Until my refusal to experiment on rats, I had been on my way to a career in an exciting field, but I was still left wanting. I couldn't figure out what was wrong with Scott or why. I wasn't going to be the knight in shining armor saving the Hart family from utter ruin. Most pressing, from my perspective, I wasn't going to be able to guarantee that a child of my own wouldn't be just like my brother. If I couldn't find the root cause, how was I supposed to find a fix?

That I might have been looking in the wrong place or from

the wrong angle didn't occur to me. I was convinced the sole fault was in my brother, ignoring other stars in his constellation.

BY THE SUMMER OF 1972, my dad had a new idea for prosperity—a campground and RV park in Northern California. He loved the outdoors, he loved camping, he loved the exhilaration that went with being closer to nature. The entire family could be a part of it. Daddy had a new goal.

This venture would be like nothing he'd ever tried before. Gone were the days of small monetary risk, juggling the rigors of a stable and stale day job. This camp resort was going to be huge and all encompassing.

His dream began to take form and substance. Even as he scooped ice cream on weekends at Jeri's Confections, he was researching and planning and designing this new life.

He might as well have been shouting "Live Free or Die" through the hallways of Lockheed—he was obsessed. And his enthusiasm began to spread. He found a half dozen other dissatisfied work compatriots who wanted to march by his side (or at least take cautious baby steps while he did the rest). He talked them into investing in this new venture: NorWes Enterprises. The corporation would start with one property, then build a chain of campgrounds rivaling any in the nation.

And he'd found the location for their maiden project: twenty-two acres of Southern Pacific Railroad land, leasable for ninety-nine years with an option for ninety-nine more, in Trinity County, California. Lush, forested land right on a lake. Paradise. He signed the lease.

My brothers caught the fever, too. Over Homestead High's

Christmas break, anxious to see this land of opportunity that was consuming Daddy's every waking moment, Scott (with Grant and another a friend) drove the Mustang to the property—a bump of land on the shores of Trinity Lake. They had no objective other than to pitch their tent and taste the sweet freedom that new lives in near-wilderness would bring. That was the plan.

Instead, Mom and Dad received another phone call.

California's Great Central Valley is notorious in winter for a phenomenon called tule fog—ground-hugging clouds of dense vapor that hang around for days or weeks. It is the leading cause of weather-related deaths in our state. Seeing through a bale of cotton would be no less impossible than driving through tule fog.

My parents drove through the fog, the Thunderbird crawling at the speed of their fellow drivers, drafting behind big rigs they hoped were more familiar with the shrouded roads to Trinity Lake than they were. They could see nothing ahead. They tried not to think about what was ahead.

Scott had annihilated the Mustang somewhere along the winding roads near the lake.

He and his friend had walked away unscathed. Grant had not been with them when the accident happened—and for that, my parents thanked every deity who came to mind as they inched toward Trinity Lake to retrieve their sons.

The story Scott told to the sheriff, who happened on the scene of the accident hours later, was that he'd swerved to avoid a deer. I doubt the sheriff believed him, as we came to learn that such an excuse was common for locals and tourists alike even though statistics didn't support the probability.

It had been snowing. Excessive speed had been involved, as any idiot would have known. Whether drugs or alcohol had played their part would never be known—too much time had elapsed before the sheriff arrived, and Scotty was denying any such accusation.

The Mustang was a mess—a total write-off. One side of the car was crushed, the roof smashed to within inches of the driver's door, the hood rolled into the wheel well. Twisted straps of trim and roof supports pierced the interior. The passenger door had been torn from its hinges.

Neither occupant had a scratch. No deer was hurt in the disaster. Hopefully some lucky '65 Mustang owners were able to retrieve spare parts from the wreckage, because no other good came from the incident.

The return home was shrouded in more than tule fog.

DESPITE HIS DEATH-DEFYING experience and poor academic performance, Scott was on track to graduate from high school. He had managed to keep his grades respectable enough to avoid flunking out altogether. Apparently the authorities at Homestead were sufficiently oblivious to his truancies and disregard for school property, so a diploma wasn't in jeopardy on that account. I don't recall that he'd ever been suspended, but that may have been because I stopped paying attention to such details of his life.

He'd stayed in football, despite mediocre grades and the displeasure of his coaches when he'd violate rules—like the time he painted his shoes white. That was soon after Broadway Joe Namath of the New York Jets had introduced the look,

ushering in an era of flamboyance for football players. NFL players were becoming superstars rather than simple team players—and Namath was at the forefront. Scotty wanted to be a superstar.

Other trouble loomed, however. Scott started running with a group of known drug users—the proverbial “bad crowd.” Already encased in my skeptical crust, when I heard this, my thought was that the crowd had probably been fine until they met up with my brother. By that time, he was dealing drugs, too (although the family didn’t know that).

He shaved his head once on a dare. The school didn’t care, even though it had happened in their locker room. This prank did little more than piss off my mother, who was sickened by the sight of his cue-ball head on the pillow when she woke him in the mornings. She had come to hate his hair when the lush blond curls of his youth had grown coarse and wiry as he entered puberty—she called it “kinky.” She liked it even less when he had none at all.

Soon after the head-shaving incident, Scott ran away from home (to live in a friend’s garage for a while), leaving a note for my parents, advising them not to look for him because they had “suffered enough” as a result of him—the implication being that they would be better off without him. *“There must be something wrong with me, but I just can’t seem to change,”* he lamented in the note.

Mom shrugged his absence away. Dad said little. I found out about these new arrangements only after a passing reference from one of my parents. Scott was rarely home under normal circumstances—I doubted my parents would have noticed the more permanent absence had it not been for that note.

Even from his friend's garage, Scott managed to attend school. For a time.

SCOTT'S ULTIMATE ABSENCE FROM SCHOOL became known to Mom and Dad about the same time as word got around that he was no longer living in his friend's garage—and that another burglary had occurred in the area. This time a vehicle was taken—our neighbors returned from their vacation to find their car missing.

That and Scott's disappearance were quickly linked. Between the time of the theft and the date it was reported, he'd had close to two weeks of free rein. He could have driven anywhere in that time.

He sent no word to my parents. Scant weeks before his eighteenth birthday and less than six months from graduation, Scott had disappeared. Graduation day passed—and still no sign of him.

The mystery was finally solved in early summer when a Maine state trooper pulled over a car with California license plates and a busted headlight. The car had been reported stolen. My brother was behind the wheel—and was taken into custody.

For the first time in his life, Scott was incarcerated. In Maine, of all places.

With a postmark of August 24, 1973, Dad soon received a letter from his eldest son—this time from a jail cell:

Dear Dad,

As you know by now I'm still in trouble. Maybe this letter doesn't

[mean] anything to you but I must ask you for help. Dad I'm so confused and I need love. I know now what heaven it was living with a loving father & mother although I disabused my stay. The world is one cold place and I don't know what to do. I know exactly where I've gone wrong. All I've done in recent years stealing, lying, it was all due to my stupidness and smoking dope. Pot is what has made me the way I am today. Doctors say that pot has no harmful effects on the body, but I know from experience and everyday experiences with the drug, it does have an effect on your way of thinking. It makes you not care of the consequences. It just makes you react to impulse. It's been close to a month since I've last smoked pot and I can tell you I've never felt better and cleaner in my life. Dad I don't know how you will react to this letter, but maybe I'm hoping for too much. I really need to start all over again and I need a hand. Sitting in this lousy jail cell makes me think. It makes me think of all the good I could have done. I could have just as well turned out to be a good guy as a bad one. It seems to be easier to keep yourself clean.

Dad if you have any love left for me it's what I need to start again. It's even harder for you and Mom than it is for me. I love all you very much and I only wish I had shown it before it was too late. The people in this jail scare me very much, just to think they will be in and out for the rest of their lives.

I've never done time before but even one day is hell. I know what I must do to help myself out. I don't much care for the 9 to 5 routine of life but its 1000% better than doing time. I know when I get back to California I will be doing time. But I'm willing to do 10 years and get it off my back rather than to remain sick and always running. Please do me a favor. Dad come visit with me and talk to me even if is only for a minute. Because I could use to see a loving face. Dad none of this letter is bullshit. Even if you won't help me a

little please come and see me once in a while please.

Love

Scott

Ah, the traditional cry of the newly incarcerated: *I'll never do that again, I promise. I swear I know where I went wrong. I'll be good from now on, I vow.* It was a familiar lament to my parents—they had heard the same each time Scott was caught at his many peccadillos.

I laughed at his self-diagnosis: marijuana had made him the way he was.

Rot. I may not have discovered the cause of his real issue, but I did know he didn't have access to pot when he was five years old. Marijuana wasn't driving his toddler self to break into neighborhood homes, break puppy legs, or break the gender barrier by donning girls' underwear. Something was going on with my brother, but it wasn't drug induced.

SCOTT WAS REMANDED TO THE custody of the Santa Clara County Courts, held at the county jail during his trial and prior to sentencing. I visited him there. Why, I don't know or don't remember. Duty? Curiosity? Masochism?

The visiting room at the jailhouse reminded me of the reptile display at the San Francisco Zoo—a long dark hallway with evenly spaced openings of glass on both sides, through which the animals could be observed without fear of harm to visitors.

The majority of light came from behind the glass, where the prisoners were seated. I don't remember if we had to communicate with a telephone or if we spoke through one of those

miniature storm drains set into the glass. It doesn't matter now—we managed.

I was there for the better part of an hour, during which time I learned Scott had survived the drive to Maine by burglarizing businesses after hours, careful to choose places without alarm signage. One mechanic's shop had been patrolled by a German Shepherd—but he had befriended the dog and gone about his business unmolested. He told me what and how, but never why. I hope I asked, but I don't remember that I did.

Others were there visiting their loved ones as well, quietly expressing their affection and support through the thick windows. Behind us was a prisoner in shackles, holding garish paintings against the glass for his woman caller to see—paintings splashed with dazzling colors and fierce figures.

“What’s he here for?” I whispered to Scott, who was not shackled.

“Murder.”

I don’t remember much else from the conversation. Scott was there for stealing a car and, ultimately, destroying the trust of his family. At least it wasn’t murder.

Despite having been on the “right” side of the glass, I left shaking, the creepy sensation of the reptile house upon me.

Scotty was sentenced to six months with the California Youth Authority (CYA) in Stockton, California—a minimum security facility reserved for juvenile offenders. Since the crime had been committed prior to his eighteenth birthday, he had avoided the more brutal environs of a full-out penitentiary. Nonetheless, CYA was prison.

So, in 1973 my brother didn’t graduate. Instead, he was caged and labeled a felon.

Part 3

Flotsam

“The initial trauma of a young child may go underground but it will return to haunt us.”

– James Garbarino

Chapter 1

1980

THEY SPLIT UP, my grandmother told Mom. Little more than six months into their marriage, Scott and JoAnn had called it quits. More accurately, JoAnn had.

The story Mamo relayed to the family was that JoAnn had arrived home one evening to find her two-bedroom apartment barricaded, with my brother inside dressed in her bathrobe and ladies' undergarments. He refused to let her in.

My mom claims not to have been surprised. She'd lost her faith in Scott long ago and anticipated he couldn't keep himself straight for long. To her way of thinking, dissolution of the marriage had only been a matter of time. Or perhaps she would say "disillusion in the marriage."

I wasn't entirely surprised either. The Harts were familiar with the mercurial nature of its middle child. And Scott's fascination with women's underwear had been going on since *The Night of the Whispers* when he was five—maybe before that. Since most fetishes don't show up until puberty, I suspected Scott's interest to be more complex than a mere obsession. What that may have been, I didn't know: a need for closeness with Mom? A revisiting of the soft things he'd loved as a child? A gender-identification issue? Regardless, I'd moved

past pursuing psychological theories about him. I saw no point. I didn't care anymore.

Mamo had a different take. He'd stayed with her for a time after one of his CYA stints, so I guess she thought she was the expert: "When he stayed with me, sometimes he'd get phone calls. One time this very effeminate man called—said he was a friend of Scott's from CYA. I took a message, but didn't pass it on. I can only imagine what went on in that jail. Poor Scotty was ruined by that experience."

Good ole Mamo, again with her excuses for my brother: *Poor Scotty, it wasn't his fault.* Yeah. Right.

Scott's cross-dressing lockout was the final insult for JoAnn. She moved in with her parents. She was done. The marriage was over.

After receiving the news, I gave it no more thought. On the verge of success, my brother had once again fucked up his life. It was a pattern with which my parents and I were familiar.

Chapter 2

1973

MY FATHER HAD A WARPED sense of tribe.

The Harts were to visit Scott in his new digs at CYA. My father had planned the occasion as an incongruous family outing, despite protests from most of us, especially Mom. Her stated excuse was that she didn't want to leave Mamo alone in the candy store on a Saturday. The more probable reason was that she didn't want see Scott in prison any more than I did.

But Dad wouldn't listen. Mamo would be fine. She had hired help. She was an adult. Mom was overruled.

I had moved back home by that time, back into my old bedroom (now claustrophobically crammed with the furnishings and detritus from my brief apartment experiment), unable to financially manage on my own. My plans were to regroup and try again within a year. In the meantime, I was once again thrust into the saga of the Harts plus one (Mamo).

With Scott ensconced in jail, I assumed all would be quiet on the home front—I was wrong.

When we lived in Granada Hills, Mamo was in our lives regularly—she only lived a few miles away. She'd visit on weekends and every holiday. She was at our Index home so often the neighborhood kids began to call her Mamo, too, running to her in greeting as her big white car rolled up to our curb.

They were as enthusiastic about Mamo's visit as my brothers and I were. She brought cookies and little presents and seldom yelled at us for our infractions. What more could be asked of a grandmother?

She hadn't changed much in the interim between Index Street and Edmonton, but I had. Where once her gentle suggestions of "shouldn't we" were welcomed as new ideas for a growing mind, I began to view them as demands couched in cotton. "Shouldn't we" really meant, "you should"—and, when resisted, Mamo would simmer with displeasure much in the same way Mom had learned to do. When "shouldn't we" no longer worked, she resorted to silent sabotage, fussing and slowing to a snail's pace until we either acquiesced or moved on in disgust. Psychology has a name for such behavior: passive/aggressive. Mamo's picture might as well have been posted beside the definition.

One of the many stories Mom told of her dad (to illustrate his wickedness and unreliability) was when Grampa Byron had promised his young family a trip to the movies after dinner one night. Such an event was a special treat in the early 1940s, and my teenage Mom, who loved the movies, was ecstatic. However, before the dinner table had been cleared, Grandpa Byron strode from the house alone and in anger, leaving both Mom and my Uncle Doug disappointed. In Mom's version of the tale, she blamed her father—see how he broke promises and couldn't be trusted? Instead, I soon suspected Mamo of subtle scheming. She had failed to clear the dishes and clean up after dinner (considered her job) in a timely manner. My grandfather had merely reacted in frustration to her foot-dragging. Mamo, by her own admission, hated movies.

In much the same way, Mamo had infiltrated the rhythm of the Hart household on Edmonton, gently bullying the entire family into doing what she wanted without seeming to be at the forefront at all.

Mom was almost resigned to the oppression. I was not. The teenage eye-rolling that most daughters reserve for their parents, I now employed with my meddlesome grandmother. She annoyed me at every turn.

One especially irksome incident was over a discussion between my grandmother and Mom about my brothers. Mom was in deep despair over Scott's latest escapade and her worries about his influence on Grant. However, instead of offering encouragement and support, Mamo offered my mother vitriol. She told Mom she had been a bad mother and blamed her for all of Scotty's problems—and Grant's, too.

This from a woman who should not have been throwing stones.

When Mom told me what Mamo had said, I was furious.

"You have two kids who turned out fine. How can she call you a bad mother? Who is she to judge?"

But I said nothing to Mamo—I merely stewed. Like my mother would have.

THE OUTING TO CYA was one hell of a way to get the family together.

Had I not known the prison's real purpose, I might have mistaken the facility for a high school with live-in accommodations.

The Harts first gathered in the cafeteria—a clean, well-lighted place for cons. There we handed over the small gifts we had

brought with us, listening as Scotty spoke of his life behind bars. Nothing shocking—it might have been summer camp, the way he described it. He expressed gratitude for our presence and presents.

Mamo and Scott's girlfriend at the time, Kim, had visited not long before. They too had showered him with tidbits of normalcy—candy, cigarettes, conversation. He was getting on fine, thanks to his friends and family.

We took a tour. His accommodations looked like a hospital ward he shared with a half-dozen other inmates—a cluster of single beds with a nightstand, locker-like closets at the far end of the room (without locks, of course). He played his guitar for us, competent renditions of traditional blues plus snippets from some of his favorite musicians: Carlos Santana, Led Zeppelin, Eric Clapton, Neil Young. He'd improved from when I last heard him. Jail had accorded him a lot of time to practice.

He showed us his artwork: surrealistic colorful images that were quite good. Scott had never expressed an interest in art before, avoiding anything that smacked of a direct contest with me. I had long been considered the artist in the family. My specialty was realistic portraiture in charcoal and oil pastels, acrylics and pencil. My work was respectable, but nothing unique, nothing to set me apart from any other half-decent renderer. Given the accolades my parents heaped on my work, however, it was little wonder that Scott had avoided competing in something as personal as art. Upon seeing his drawings, however, I thought that might have been a mistake. He was good, in a different way from me.

The entire day, Scott was relaxed and confident, presenting

the fruits of his many endeavors, never commenting on Mom's sullenness—or mine.

A FEW MONTHS SHY of his expected release, Scott went over the CYA fence.

He was apprehended several weeks later, charged with attempted rape (the charge eventually dropped for lack of evidence). His original sentence was merely extended. So instead of six months, Scott served closer to a year in prison as a result of his joy-ride to Maine.

I took little notice of his continuing misbehavior. In fact, I consistently dismissed him altogether, spending less time psychoanalyzing him and more time on finding my niche in the world. Scott became an annoying blot on my otherwise busy calendar.

Chapter 3

1974-1975

FOR MY TWENTY-SECOND BIRTHDAY, Scott made me an accomplice.

Mamo had rented a unit in a little fourplex on Dover Way in San Jose—close to the candy shop, but out of the Edmonton house. Something needed to change. She and Mom were not getting along at home, but she liked making candy—so the apartment was the compromise. Move out and keep the job. Her pension and Social Security ensured that she would be comfortable.

Since Scott's release from CYA that summer, he'd been sleeping on Mamo's couch more often than not (as his presence wasn't welcomed at home). He managed to get a temporary job working in the stockroom at Bullock's, a posh anchor store which was to open later that year in the newly built Vallco Parkway shopping center in Cupertino. I guess Bullock's wasn't doing background checks on their temporary help.

He had a birthday gift for me and requested I come over to Mamo's. I suppose I should have been gracious that he'd remembered my birthday, given all the other crap in his life—but I wasn't. I was barely civil to him—and was polite only because I was trying to navigate the terrain around my folks, Grant, and Mamo without hurting too many feelings. It was not easy.

The present turned out to be a beautiful set of salad servers in sterling silver with modern Plexiglas handles, presented in a box covered with a pink, orange, and lime-green psychedelic pattern—in the years Madison Avenue was stealing the “hip” from “hippie” and making it their own. The gift was lovely and I told Scott so, thanking him for his generosity.

I called Bullock’s the next day.

“When will the store be open?”

The Bullock’s representative gave me the date, which was several weeks in the future.

“Can one of your employees buy things now, if they wanted?”

The woman laughed. “Oh, no. They have to wait like everybody else.”

I suppose I should have given the gift back to Scott, making it clear I knew he’d stolen it. Or I could have returned it to the store, explaining how I happened to have it and surely costing Scott his job. I could have thrown it away. But I didn’t do any of those things, frozen in a private dilemma: should I insult him, should I hand him over to the authorities, would he just end up at my parents’ doorstep again? I couldn’t make up my mind. He was a shithead. He was my brother.

Bullock’s opened on time, and the temporary workers were dismissed.

I still have those servers in their psychedelic box.

BULLOCK’S WAS AN ABERRATION, for few employers would touch Scott given his criminal background. Once his temporary stint at the department store was over, my parents hired him to clear slash and widowmakers from the resort land on

Trinity Lake. Their pitch was that he'd be doing them a favor, but I was convinced their intent was to get him as far away as possible.

They had installed an old trailer on the property, filled the appropriate tanks with propane and water—and there he'd live until the winter weather prevented more work from being done. They would pay him—Dad would travel up every few weeks to assess the progress and assign new tasks.

Clearing virgin forest of detritus is backbreaking, but Scott had always been a hard worker when he bothered. This arrangement kept him occupied, employed, and away from home. In the short time since his release, he'd not only purloined my birthday gift, but had committed at least one additional burglary. The victims, the parents of a friend of his, had driven by our house shouting obscenities in protest. The police hadn't been able to pin the deed on Scott, but the victims knew. After the shouting, everybody knew.

My parents wanted him gone—well, my mom wanted him gone. Daddy had stopped arguing with Mom about Scott long ago.

They may not have been able to rid themselves of the bad penny that was my brother, but Pinewood Cove accorded them a chance to get him out of sight for a while longer.

SCOTT MANAGED TO REMAIN out of prison by the time his twentieth birthday came around in March of 1975. He (and Grant, when he had breaks from school) had made significant progress on clearing the property up north. But he'd been driven south by snow.

To keep himself occupied and earning during the break, Scott took a job with the Bulls in their San Jose screen shop. He had worked for them in the months before he was first jailed, on weekends and after school (since he couldn't work at the candy store anymore, having been caught stealing too many times by my parents). The Bulls liked his work—Scott was quick yet careful. They knew about his theft issues, but they weren't going to have him handle money, so they didn't worry about that. They still had a soft spot for my brother because of his treatment of Susie. The Bulls were among the few who offered my brother another chance.

Scott requested a small party for his birthday, and my parents acquiesced. Steve Kessler (whom my parents had always liked) was invited, along with another boy named Steve (the friend whose home had been victimized by Scott shortly after his release). Grant was there, as well as Scott's new girlfriend, Teri, and her sister. I was in attendance, by parental request.

Teri was gorgeous. Scott had always attracted girls, many (although not all) attractive. But Teri was stunning. Blue-eyed, dark haired, with a winning smile and California-girl charm, Teri was even prettier than the delicate blonde beauty Becky, the girl Scott had taken to his junior prom. How he managed to attract women, given his past, I didn't know. What had become of the steadfast Kim, I didn't know either. I didn't ask.

Mom baked a cake for the occasion, decorating it in accordance with Scotty's specifications—a gaudy floral display across the top and sides. He'd seen the pattern in Mom's cake-deco-rating book. Mom complained that he'd picked the most complicated one—to test her skills, no doubt.

The cake was the ugliest thing I'd ever seen. But Mom had done as he asked—it looked exactly like the picture.

I had moved out of the house again, earlier in the year, this time for good. I was merely a visitor to our Edmonton home that day. I laughed along with the Steves, the girls, and my little brother. By then, my casual rebuff of Scott was habit—I don't remember talking with him that day at all. I have only photographs to remind me that I was even there.

DAD's NORTHERN CALIFORNIA project forged ahead. Every spare minute was spent planning and fundraising and promoting the venture. He'd already spent countless hours applying for permits, arguing with the Environmental Protection Agency about an abandoned osprey nest on the property, poring over and modifying the blueprints based on the planning commission and U.S. Forestry input. The project had a name: Pinewood Cove was to be Daddy's dream made real.

That spring, my father was ready to move on from candy to campground. He quit his job at Lockheed. Jeri's Confections was sold—in the five years the Harts owned the candy store, it had barely broken even anyway. The house on Edmonton was sold too, the proceeds (which were substantial for the time) dumped into NorWes Enterprises and subsequently Pinewood Cove. All of the household furniture and appliances went into storage. The Harts were all in.

I was working at a computer company in San Jose and had moved in with my boyfriend. I had no reason to follow my family this time. I didn't care for camping much anyway (backpacking had become more my style—self-reliance my

watchword). At that juncture, Pinewood Cove was nothing more than a tree-covered pile of dirt and rock—no running water, electricity, toilets, or buildings. Thanks to Scott and Grant, there were cleared patches beneath the pines to allow for tents and tools and parking. Otherwise, there was nothing. I saw no future for me there.

By June, the rest of my clan was “settled” in or near the twenty-foot trailer: my parents, my brothers, two cats and two dogs. The only way to communicate was through letters—of which there would be copious numbers between Mom and me from that time on. Life for the Harts had suddenly become rudimentary in scope.

No further proof was needed of how much Mom loved my dad—only love could have made those living arrangements palatable.

DADDY HAD ACOLYTES. I came to believe that his camp-ground plans might have been the dream-come-true of every American man in the State of California between the ages of seventeen and seventy. All my male co-workers were envious of Dad’s venture, and Daddy had no trouble attracting workers to the property. The corporation was paying minimum wage, except for specialized and time-bound jobs, but that didn’t discourage the herd. They came, they saw, they worked their butts off. They didn’t always get along, but they labored hard and seemed to enjoy most of it.

By the time I visited for a few weeks in late July, early August, the crew had managed to bring running water and electric lines to the property, cut several roads, and leveled numerous

sites where the well, office buildings, toilets, and RV/tent sites would one day sit. The trailer had been moved to the location it would eventually occupy for several years—it was where Mom and Dad slept (with the cats, when they deigned to show their whiskers), and Mom prepared meals for the workers. Numerous tents were pitched nearby for storage of tools and other supplies and to house the rest of the gang, including my brothers and the dogs.

Mom welcomed my help, although I doubt I did more than give her moral support. I washed dishes and scrubbed pots and pans, or did laundry in the nearby town of Weaverville. However, I never was a gracious volunteer when it came to cooking or shopping. Nonetheless, in the grand scheme of her responsibilities, anything I offered was cheered.

She was adjusting well to the new environment—certainly better than I expected. The duties were constant, but not unlike those she'd taken on for most of her life. Daddy was occupied with activities he loved, which made her happy. The only thing she complained about was the dirt: red and ubiquitous. Damn stuff got into everything and wouldn't come out, especially from clothes. Even after copious amounts of bleach, everything eventually took on a rusty pink hue. Still, she refused to stop wearing white. Mom could be very stubborn.

Her favorite subject of conversation was the crew—their individual personalities and foibles kept her well stocked with funny stories and observations. They treated her like a mom and confided in her, so she became enmeshed in their lives and stories, all to her delight.

The only fly in the ointment was Scott—but this time, Mom was not the one complaining about him. According to what she

was hearing from the other workers, whenever Dad was absent, Scott would boss them. The *de facto* heir apparent had taken to pushing his weight around—the crew was not amused. Given that Dad's workers consisted of several young men with far more experience in construction than even my Dad had, Scott's assumption of management was a thorn in their side. Scott had no experience at all with building sites or with managing men.

When told of the predicament, however, Dad did little more than to demand Scott "knock it off." He didn't officially appoint a back-up manager. Instead, he hid himself in the tool tent for a time, cleaning wrenches and sorting nuts and bolts. Confrontation was not my dad's forte.

THE TRAILER HAD A PULLOUT BED, under the dining table. That's where I slept on my first visit. That is until one night, about a week into my stay, when Mom woke me to request I move to one of the tents. My bed was needed. Scott's girlfriend Teri, who had been visiting for a few days, had been injured. Scott had rolled another car.

How he even came to have another car was a mystery. Grant seems to remember that Scott had talked the local bank into giving him a line of credit, based on the existence of Pinewood Cove. I can't figure how that might have been accomplished, but however he'd managed, Scott had a car: a 1967 Barracuda, automatic.

His story was that he had swerved to avoid a deer, sending the car up the side of an embankment and onto its roof. Another deer. Imagine that.

Grant's version (to us, not the law) was a little different.

He and Scott had been in a high-speed chase along Highway 3. Grant, with his four-speed manual transmission (also a Barracuda) had been in the lead most of the way—until they'd reached the bridge over Stoney Creek where Scott, Teri beside him, had pulled ahead and sped off. Unfortunately, he didn't slow sufficiently for the next curve. There had been no deer, but the embankment climb and the totaled car had been the truth.

Scott and Teri were taken to the nearest emergency room (which was in Redding—at least fifty miles away). Several stitches marred Teri's forehead. However, other than bumps, bruises, and a massive headache, she was fine. Again, Scott was unscathed. As far as I know, he wasn't charged with any crime—not even reckless driving or endangerment.

One consequence of his recklessness, however, was an end to the romance with Teri. Her father threatened to sue my parents for her “disfigurement”—he evidently had dreams of her becoming a model. Since Scott was over eighteen, however, he was no longer my parents' legal responsibility—and given that he was penniless, a lawsuit against my brother would have been fruitless.

While the lawsuit threat came to nothing, Teri was still under the influence of her parents—and was forbidden from seeing Scott again. Given the distance between Sunnyvale, where she lived, and Pinewood Cove, that wasn't hard to accomplish.

MORE PROGRESS WAS MADE. By the end of the summer, the well was dug and a 50,000 water tank was installed at the crest of the property, providing clear, clean Artisan spring water to the grounds. An intricate system of dirt roads had been cut,

although no shale had yet been trucked in to protect them from dissolving into muddy ruts once the rainy season began. Foundations for several of the future buildings had been poured and the appropriate plumbing installed (although much of it was still exposed). Framing had begun for the main structure that was to be my parents' house/office and, in the back, the first of the public toilets. Despite such inroads, construction on the property was by no means complete.

What had not been obvious to my dad when work on the Pinewood Cove resort began in earnest was that everything cost a lot more in 1975 than it had in the 1972 planning phase. In the interim, the nation had been mauled by a gas crisis that quadrupled the cost of a barrel of oil and, subsequently, inflated the price of everything. As a result, the funds allocated by the NorWes Enterprises for the first year of development vanished quicker than expected.

To get by during the approaching off-season, my parents were contemplating taking jobs outside of the resort. Grant was in his senior year at the local high school. Scott had returned to the Bay Area at the end of August, citing "Dad's attitude" as his reason for leaving (which could have stemmed from anything: Dad not leaving him in charge or being unwilling to finance a new car—anything). Since his release from jail, Scot had become more mercurial.

During this interim, Scott tried to join the Army. They wouldn't take him because of his arrest history.

WHATEVER HE'D BEEN DOING since August, by October Scott was back at Pinewood Cove. By November, like the

rest of the family, he was looking for a job in Weaverville or Redding or anywhere, really. Any job was better than none. Mom was determined to try waitressing (which she'd never done before) if need be. When the camping season ended, NorWes Enterprises had frozen funds and suspended further work on the resort. The Hart's personal bank account was down to \$1,000—and that had to last through the winter and into spring of the next year to pay for transportation costs, food and propane, and whatever else was deemed essential, like a new water heater for the trailer.

Through the fall, the main structure had been enclosed and equipped with toilets and sinks. A propane light and heater made the place livable—so that's where Grant and Scott and the last remaining worker (nicknamed Poopsie) lived. Mom and Dad remained in the trailer.

The trailer was hooked into the propane and had water, sewage and electricity. Without any TV, telephone or radio reception, however, entertainment for my parents consisted of watching a raccoon family who raided their trash cans each night. To keep them from the garbage, Mom started feeding them leftovers, enamored with their antics and anxious to keep them coming back. Many of her letters from this time contained long passages devoted to the little bandits as well as awed descriptions of the countryside that was her new home. Vivid reports of the surrounding beauty were intermingled with details of their dire financial circumstances.

Sometime around Thanksgiving, Scott was arrested again—I didn't even ask on what charges this time. My parents refused to sign a bond for his release—they had no collateral to back it up anyway—so he remained in jail for the requisite 30 days

or whatever the charges had demanded. Apparently whatever the infraction, it hadn't risen to the level of probation violation, so by Christmas he'd been released and had disappeared again. By year end, he still hadn't contacted my folks.

His silence may have bothered my dad, but Mom claimed not to care. Her worried mention of it in her last letter of the year belied such a claim.

Chapter 4

1976

Don't settle for anything but the best—and the best should make you happy.

THE PHRASE, IN MOM'S FIRST LETTER of the New Year, was meant for me. However, when I look back, I see it as a cry for herself.

Dad was due to visit the Bay Area for more fundraising. Her letter, however, included his regrets—he couldn't meet me for a dinner date on this trip, as he so often did when he was in town. Nor would Mom be accompanying him (as she'd done on similar sojourns periodically over the fall and winter). The reason? There was no one else to stay on the property, ensure things were safe, and take care of the dogs. Poopsie had moved on to work for his father in Italy. After the holiday break, Grant had started back to school to finish out his senior year. And Scott had been arrested yet again.

This time, it was more than ugly.

Scott was charged with seven serious felony counts following break-ins at several local businesses, including two mobile home parks, the beauty shop, and the answering service Dad used for the business. He'd stolen hundreds of dollars—and then, when caught, claimed he'd done it to help his parents.

Mom was furious (I assumed my father was as well, although her letter didn't mention Daddy's response). Not only had they not benefitted in the least from his thieving, but they were now more fearful than ever. If the authorities were to believe Scott's claim, both my folks and a project valued at more than a quarter-of-a-million dollars were in serious jeopardy.

Fortunately, the sheriff was sympathetic and believed none of Scott's lies (although the courts still had to weigh in). For the sake of my struggling parents, he tried to keep all references to the break-ins out of the newspapers. Regardless, Weaverville is a small community and word spread. Grant was harassed at school with speculation that *he* had been the Hart caught stealing.

By March, Scott was back in a CYA facility, this time in Ione at the Preston School of Industry (most notable among its alumni being country singers Merle Haggard and Johnny Cash). The courts could have treated Scott far more harshly—but for some reason they didn't, handling this latest stunt as a parole violation. He'd avoided a sentence that could have sent him to adult prison. Had I not known better, I might have thought him charmed.

By this time, Mom was convinced that Scotty simply couldn't handle pressure, caving at the first sign of stress or responsibility. Forfeiting any hope that he could make it on his own, at the tender age of twenty-one, Mom labelled Scott "institutionalized."

NEW FUNDING FOR Pinewood Cove was finally released in late winter. Construction continued and, much to my father's

pleasure, a marina was purchased. The goal was to have about a third of the planned RV and tent sites open for campers by Memorial Day—the unofficial start of camping season in California. This would be Phase One.

Mom's letters were filled with almost-desperate hope for continuation of good weather (so that construction would not further slow), relief that their financing worries had abated, and pride in the work her youngest son was doing in school and on the property. If she bothered to mention Scott at all, her scorching words hid nothing.

According to Mom, Dad periodically mentioned missing me, especially after one of my frequent but brief visits. He had gotten closer to Grant as they worked side by side. He doted on the dogs and the cats. And his enthusiasm for this manifestation of his dream had not waned, despite the setbacks—he walked the property not only to assess progress, but in appreciation of the land. He marveled when he found evidence of the deer and bear that roamed nearby, researching the area's history, collecting arrowheads and semiprecious stones from the overturned dirt. She worried about him, though—for his newfound appreciation of his eldest and youngest children was colored with melancholy, and he seldom spoke of Scott.

Mamo, who had stayed in the Bay Area despite the sale of Jeri's Confections, wrote to Mom, telling her of Scotty: the letters she received from Preston, begging for candy and cigarettes. According to her, he hated his "new" abode and was thinking of going AWOL again, pining for the Stockton facility where he started. Apparently Preston was "*full of punks who would do anything for kicks.*" This new place scared him.

He wrote to my parents, too—letters quite different from

the begging ones he wrote to Mamo. With my parents, he expressed contrition: *This time will be different. This time I'll get some real help instead of telling the psychologists what they want to hear. This time ...*

Mom had heard this all before. *Yeah, my boy? Show me.*

BY SUMMER'S END, Pinewood Cove had its marina. However, Trinity Lake was by then showing signs of anemia. California was in the throes of another of its periodic droughts.

Since its inception as a state, when records began to be kept, California has never been good at water management. Although the State eked through its chronic misuse of water most years, it did so just barely and rarely to the satisfaction of its citizens.

Still, my parents were surprised when the authorities chose to keep Whiskeytown Lake (Trinity's "feeder" lake) at maximum, while depleting the water from the other lakes it supplied. Instead of looking for a more equitable solution, the "lesser" lakes were literally sacrificed. Water levels dropped. Fish perished. Businesses were squeezed.

Pinewood Cove still had enough water in which to float its new marina. The lake was low, but not bereft. However, in addition to the physical blight, Sacramento newspapers were erroneously warning tourists to stay away. The businesses that ringed Trinity Lake continued to suffer.

A rain squall at the end of summer provided a modicum of relief, but it had little effect on the drought. Instead, the untimely showers ran off the few paying customers my parents did have.

Although feedback on the resort's amenities and beauty from those few patrons was great—the place was beautiful, well-maintained, everything a visitor could want—overall, Pinewood Cove's first camping season was a bust. Little revenue had been collected to offset the tremendous costs both of construction and on-going maintenance.

Then, at the end of September, California's water management "gurus" let Trinity Lake fall an additional twenty-five feet. Few funds could be pried from the tight fists of NorWes Enterprises' conservative directors and investors. My parents were again faced with a winter of want.

Grant's car and the Thunder Chicken were corroding and generally falling apart—having endured harsh weather without shelter. There was no money for repairs or new tires or anything.

The winter rains that year didn't turn to snow (which would have meant some relief from the drought for the upcoming summer). Just before Christmas, my parents got word that NorWes Enterprises' corporate attorney had been admitted to a mental hospital—a report that brought little sympathy from Daddy. After what he and my mom had endured, who really had the right to go crazy?

Grant planned on looking for work in the Bay Area following the departure of the final campers in mid-November and Mom was thinking of doing the same. My dad contacted Lockheed about potential consulting work that might get him and his family through the winter.

As my parents sank further into the morass of Pinewood Cove, they heard nothing from Scott.

Chapter 5

1977-1978

IN FEBRUARY, NORWES ENTERPRISES formally informed my parents what they already knew—they were on their own. The corporation had run out of money. With gas prices still on the rise and the cost of everything else tagging along, the investors were running scared. Besides, the lake was down 105 feet, thanks to California's superior water management team. Who wanted to camp and boat at a resort without water? The new marina was sitting on the lakebed by then.

Dad applied for a Small Business Association disaster loan.

Dad's biological father had moved in with my folks the previous Thanksgiving. What had started out as a mere visit had become more permanent as the year ended.

Grampa Hart had divorced my grandmother, Mimi, when my dad was about two years old. He'd remarried, adopted a daughter. My family and I saw him and his second wife, Isabel, every Christmas and once each summer when we visited their home in San Diego. Other than that, interaction was rare. I always thought they were nice, especially Gramma Isabel, but since they didn't live as close as my other grandparents, I didn't get to know them well. Apparently that was by design—Daddy never said anything, but he and his father had never been close.

Gramma Isabel died of lung cancer in the mid-60s and

Grampa Hart had remained a bachelor for more than a decade before marrying Edy. That marriage had ended in September, prompting Grampa Hart to sell his house and, in what I believe was a last-ditch effort to resurrect a relationship with his only son, took up residence at Pinewood Cove. His timing couldn't have been worse, but he had no way of knowing that. I think he sincerely meant to mend the shattered fences of my dad's youth.

The mending wasn't going well. Grampa had become argumentative in his dotage. He drank a lot and smoked even more—some nights his coughing fits kept my folks awake. However, his pension money was the primary reason my parents had groceries that winter. Even the fifty dollars Grant gave them as a Christmas present went for food. Utility and gas bills (and the one last hope my mom had for normalcy—the furniture-storage bill) were paid while creditors were avoided for everything else. For once, Mom and Dad were thankful not to have a phone on the property, since it would probably have been ringing at all hours with calls from bill collectors. Instead, Pinewood Cove's answering service fielded the worst of them.

A STRUGGLING Pinewood Cove began to see its first customers in early May, although light rains kept most of the campsites empty for much of the spring.

About that same time, my parents got word that Scotty had gone AWOL from CYA yet again. He'd written to Mamo, telling her he was out of state—and couldn't come back for at least three years for fear he'd be put into a real prison if he were caught.

By June, with arguments escalating, drinking out of hand, and money still tight, the two alpha Harts at Pinewood Cove had enough of each other. "I'm leaving," Grampa Hart announced. "I don't care if you starve."

"Like you didn't care if Mom and I starved when you took off before?" was Daddy's pointed response.

Through the summer, my parents received no word about Scott. However, they did get the news that their SBA disaster loan had been denied, due to technicalities.

I GOT MARRIED IN EARLY 1978, after a tumultuous two-and-one-half year courtship that should have been a forewarning to me ... but wasn't. I saw the fairytale possibilities and ignored the rest. I was as myopic as my mother in that respect.

I didn't invite Scott to the wedding. I wanted nothing to do with him.

I had forbidden my family from divulging my telephone numbers or addresses to him during the last several years. I didn't want him popping by someday, casing the place, and determining I wouldn't miss some of my hard-earned possessions. I was not going to let that happen.

Even had I wanted to invite him, however, he was in jail again at the time of my nuptials. He'd apparently been wrong about where he would be sent if caught again, for he was back in CYA in Stockton, serving out his sentence (plus the usual extension tacked on as a result of the escape). My family and I didn't get the details of his recapture—I don't think any of us sought them out. I certainly didn't.

Chapter 6

1979

SCOTT MET JOANN IN Stockton soon after his final release from CYA at the end of 1978. He was originally a guest of her roommate—but it was JoAnn who ultimately caught his eye.

JoAnn claims to have been smitten immediately by the good-looking young man, thrilled when Scott reciprocated her interest. She teased her roommate about having been the one to snare him after all.

He came out of the California prison system in much better shape than when he went in. He had passed his high-school-equivalency test and gone on to earn a two-year college degree with honors. Turned out he was as smart as my parents always hoped he would be. His dental work had been taken care of in prison, too.

Not long before the excruciating Hart Family Reunion at the Black Angus, Scott and JoAnn had moved in together. The happy couple then visited my parents at Pinewood Cove in mid-March.

Despite her continuing caution with Scott, Mom's letter following their visit glowed with praise for JoAnn: she had been a “super guest,” helping without asking, cleaning up after herself (which was very important to Mom, given all she had to do to keep Pinewood Cove presentable for the campers). I detected

a modicum of hope in these letters for the first time. Maybe there was a future for her eldest son with this young woman.

By June, Scott and JoAnn had moved to Southern California and were married.

Scott went to work for JoAnn's dad in his San Diego tool business. He impressed his new in-laws with his intelligence and work ethic. JoAnn's parents liked him, and her father soon began to train Scott in management of the business, in the hope of one day passing the torch.

The newlyweds took a small apartment in El Monte. From all reports, married life agreed with them both. It was a quiet life, filled with work and domestic chores, quiet evenings with a few friends. An evening of *Saturday Night Live*, homemade tacos and margaritas constituted a party. Scott preferred board games to movies, but was happiest when he was playing the guitar—which he did often. He smoked pot occasionally. He drank too much, but JoAnn shrugged that off—it was seldom, she said. She didn't always like his drinking buddies, but she didn't protest that much, either. Even at the tender age of nineteen, JoAnn knew the rules of give and take in a relationship. And she was in love.

The newlyweds visited Mamo often, playing *Scrabble* (my grandmother's favorite game) and talking. Mamo had returned to Southern California not long before, to be closer to my uncle and his family. Scott and JoAnn's time with Mamo was relaxed and unhurried. Scott was a patient and solicitous husband. On the occasions of their visits, no mention was made of the money he owed his grandmother—"borrowed" but never repaid. Apparently only Mom heard such complaints from Mamo, who (as was her wont) was reluctant to criticize

her beloved grandson and, therefore, never confronted him in person with her grievances.

There was also one last visit to my parents on the grounds of Pinewood Cove later that summer. Mom bought a mini wedding cake for them, festooned with yellow roses in honor of the bride's color choice. Mom had taken note, as she always did of such things.

The groom tried to sell marijuana to some of the resort guests.

Dad asked them to leave.

ODDITIES JARRED Scott's and JoAnn's young marriage, she confessed later. They were rare but not absent.

Scott unearthed money, as he had most of his life—including a large bag he'd “found in a parking lot.” He spent that to spruce up the love nest with a new shower curtain and odds and ends that made the place more pleasant. Once, having distracted a liquor store owner, he'd come home bearing a sack filled with the man's nightly earnings.

Scott had told JoAnn of his prison time before they were married. So, just as I had speculated, she had assumed the role of JoAnn the Good and taken it in stride. The little behavioral quirks were disturbing, but she was willing to take the good with the bad, and hope for the best. Her approach to my brother was rife with such clichés, but she saw no other path to follow.

One day, while going through one of their closets, JoAnn found a garbage bag full of women's underclothes—lingerie that was not hers. When confronted, Scott confessed to having

bought the garments on his own, sometimes pilfering from laundromats. He liked to don the underwear and masturbate, he told her.

"Are you gay?" JoAnn had asked.

"No," he said. "It just feels good."

OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, as Scott's odd behavior became more frequent, JoAnn decided something needed to be said.

Those few occasions that prompted a direct confrontation were the most frightening to the young bride, for it was then that she was to meet someone different from the man she'd married—as if Scott had another personality tucked deep inside—a glaring and forceful being who brooked no opposition. This "other Scott" rarely appeared—and for that JoAnn was grateful—but his presence was memorable when he did.

JoAnn's most vivid recollection of Scotty's alternate personality was the day he raped her. It happened only once in their relationship, but she would not forget it.

As she tells it, without preamble, Scott struck her across the face, grabbed the petroleum jelly, and took her anally. He spoke not a word. When it was over, his reserve and his "no nonsense" demeanor ensured her silence about the subject—then and later.

My family and I would not learn of these disturbing details of his marriage until many years had passed. Were we to have known, I doubt we would have been surprised. Nor could we have intervened, for he had been uncontrollable for some time.

So the saga of Scott's marriage was traveling along his usual

route: Scott as the golden boy, until suddenly he wasn't. A pattern my parents and I knew well.

Chapter 7

1980

THE JANUARY DAY WHEN Scott locked JoAnn out of their apartment was the undeniable end of their marriage. JoAnn had endured suspicious acquisitions of money, drunkenness and drunken friends, an alarming rape, and Scott's fetish with women's underwear long enough. The strange behavior was infrequent, but the intensity unbearable.

When she explained to her parents why she needed to move back in with them, Scott was fired from the family business. Not only was the marriage over, but his livelihood was gone, too.

By the end of April, his life once again in shambles, Scott moved back to the Bay Area and settled for a time in Milpitas, California, where he wrote to my parents:

Dear Mom and Dad,

Thank you for returning my letter so quickly. It was kind of a surprise being so soon and all. Your letter was probably the best advice a friend could give someone else. I'm sure all the things you said carry some weight, and I don't want to hide behind "the game" I've played most of my life. So most of what you say I've been doing, like looking at myself (which is not unpainful) and taking inventory. But the best thing to do is pick up the pieces (the good ones) and start

it again. So much has to be said but more important is the actions. I hope I haven't hurt you folks beyond any repair. But God if he wants will heal it. And of course with help from us all. I don't know what you folks know about my present situation, but it is a totally low part of my life. And it was all my own doing—like always. But JoAnn & I are no longer married. And I took a beautiful woman and pumped fear into her and hurt her very much, because I thought I wanted something else—oh how little I know! I'm not crying or feeling sorry for myself—surprise—but for me it has to be this way in order for me to get straight. I'm sure God has a plan for us all and he just has to help me help myself! I'm not making excuses or covering up anything—I will achieve what needs to be done. I've done many things in my life which no one would be proud of, but the biggest mistake I've ever made was not returning the love given to me as I was growing up. Now I'm not sure I know how to give it! I believe this next statement is the turning point of my life and after 25 years of misery—it's long overdue!

For the first time in my life a part of me died when JoAnn left. It's not that she didn't have reason, she had more than enough, but now the pain has shown me what I've put others through. There have been times when I thought I would kill myself if that pain didn't stop. It did not stop—and I didn't kill myself. Oh but how easy it could have been to cop out again.

But I didn't cop out and I won't give it up. I'm broken as a man and beaten at my own game—now it's time I tried a brand new way. It's going to be hard but I don't think it will be as hard as bearing all the pain I recently have undergone.

But it took all this time and all my bad experiences to finally show me the way. Always better late than never. And then the best has yet to come. God! In the past few months God has shown me He exists,

and not in fantastic dreams or visions but with just plain understanding and doing things for me which no mortal could. During the time when JoAnn first left the pain was very hard to bear, but through his forgiveness and love he eased my pain! He didn't hide it or make me forget it (I think of it all the time) but more important he has let me learn from it! And he always listens! I know he is what I've been missing, and now that I know him there is only one way to go now—UP! After a while love and kindness will be mine and the happiness.

I still need a friend! And I'm hoping you folks will be that—again. May God be with you, and help us all.

My love,

Scott

P.S. Mom did you have that dream before or after you got my new address? I know you have always been kind of ESP-ish! Please write soon.

I have no idea (and Mom doesn't remember) what advice may have been given in any previous letter. She doesn't recall the contents of the dream he alluded to in the postscript. Neither of my parents understood completely what the rambling prose meant—for him, for them, for anyone.

One noteworthy point, however: Scott had apparently found God. He'd never shown any interest in a higher power before. What this new twist meant was anybody's guess.

AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME my brother wrote his God-enlightened letter, my parents had lost Pinewood Cove. Auctioned for pennies on the dollar, the leased land, the

improvements, the business was no longer owned and/or operated by NorWes Enterprises or the Harts. Mom and Dad were briefly kept on by the new owners as hired hands in paradise.

After five long years of crushing struggles, Mom and Dad were left with nothing. On the bell-curve of prosperity, they were somewhere near the bleeding-edge bottom of the hump. No home, low-paying back-breaking jobs, cars in ruins, \$46 in the bank, fifty years old, and demoralized. While Scott was finding God's helping hand, no higher power was paying much attention to the elder Harts.

Unfortunately, even the jobs at Pinewood ended a few months later. My folks complained that the people who'd bought the resort treated them like slaves and were never satisfied with the work they did. I never heard the other side of the story—but I was glad my parents would have nothing more to do with that life-sucking place.

Mom and Dad left the property, moved to Weaverville—and never visited Pinewood Cove again.

Part 4

Dearest Scotty

*“Of all the words of mice and men, the saddest
are, ‘It might have been.’”*

– Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat’s Cradle*

Chapter 1

1981

I HAD PLANNED ON BEING in Weaverville with my folks for the annual Fourth of July celebrations. A quaint parade and fireworks were on the docket.

My husband and I had purchased a small two-bedroom cabin in the little town of Douglas City—not too far from Weaverville. It was to be a tax write-off and a modest investment for us as well as a place where my parents could live, free of charge, until they decided to return to civilization (should that day ever arrive). If nothing else, it eased some of their continuing financial woes and offered stability for the first time in six or so years.

They moved into our tiny house the last week of June.

On the morning of July first, I was in my office sorting through paperwork when the phone rang. It was Mom.

“Are you sitting down?”

Such a horrible question. Blood flow through my body seemed to cease, a buzzing in my head interfered with sounds, my eyesight narrowed. Had I been standing, I couldn’t have for long.

“Dad’s okay,” she blurted, anticipating my worst fears. “It’s Scotty.”

Then came the usual question whenever the subject of my brother arose: "What happened?"

The pause that followed was chilling, and I was left to wonder what he'd done this time. Was it worse than previous infractions? Had he finally held up a bank? Physically hurt someone (mental hurt would not have been special—he'd been doing that for years)? Murder?

When finally she spoke, emotion quivered through her voice. "He was in a motorcycle accident. Last night. He's dead."

I was stunned into silence as Mom filled me in on what details she knew.

Scott had been on his motorcycle after a party somewhere north of San Diego. Alone. Drunk. Helmetless. He'd missed a curve in the 101 Highway or the off-ramp or a bend in life or something. The police found him at the bottom of the Front Street embankment after an unsuccessful meeting with the guardrail. He'd sustained extensive injuries to his body. His brain was deemed dead on impact. His heart soon followed suit.

Grampy identified Scotty's body. As it turned out, that was merely a formality—Scotty's fingerprints and substantial criminal history had informed the police of his identity even before my grandfather showed up at the morgue. I have no idea how they got Grampy's telephone number or why he had been chosen for the grisly task—I didn't ask.

Grampy also assumed responsibility for sorting through Scott's personal effects in the room of the Coast Motel where he'd been staying after a return to San Diego. Grampy did that before calling my parents—in hopes of discovering something that might comfort them or explain what happened, I suppose.

There was nothing like that. Scott's motorcycle helmet had been on the dresser—left there despite all reports that he had faithfully worn it at other times. His guitar was there, too. Nothing else of value remained.

Grampy complained about the sorry state of the motel room—it was a pigsty, he said.

Even as Mom relayed this to me, I wondered why either of them felt compelled to pass on that last bit of news. Just another disappointment to add to the list, I suppose. As in life, in death Scotty was unredeemable.

I LEFT WORK EARLY THAT DAY, citing a generic family emergency—without details. I had never said anything to my co-workers about Scott, so I saw no point in doing so at this juncture. My manager didn't question me—I was useless anyway, unable to stop crying, unable to keep my mind on business. I could think of nothing but that my brother was gone. Forever. My errant, stupid brother, whom I had relegated to nobody status, was now beyond my reach. I was overwhelmed with regret—and amazed my feelings ran so deep.

In this helpless state of desperation, I even penned a poem. It could have been my eulogy to Scotty had the family planned a memorial (which we didn't). Instead, it became an elegy to assuage my surprising pain and guilt.

The poem itself was awful—I never was much of a poet—and largely lost to history now, except for the questions I wove into its lines. It was written in an epistolary style. I would have preferred speaking with him directly, but since that was no longer possible, a letter seemed the only alternative. For the first time

in many years, I wanted to talk to him, wanted a dialogue—an impossible conversation, an unattainable connection.

The letter/poem began formally, as if he were a mere acquaintance, perhaps a business associate. Nothing more, nothing less. *Dear Scott.*

In the stiff opening stanza, I acknowledge my ignorance: about him, his loves, his hopes. What had he wanted from life? For life? What would have made him happy? For what was he searching? I assumed he must have been searching for something, because I couldn't imagine such a restless soul not on a quest.

Then I proceeded to ask my dead brother what I might have done, what would have made me a better sister. The question my parents asked every time his name was spoken: *Where did I go wrong?* Dear Brother, I wrote.

I ended the poem with a lament for the abrupt loss of his young life, sorrow for my own deep wound, for all of the things that might have been. My regrets spun in circles and spirals. He would never know what he'd meant to me. I hadn't known what he meant to me. With his death, I wouldn't have a chance to let him know. I had cut him from my life just as surely as if I'd cut off my fingers—and I was feeling the phantom effects of that loss. I was miserable—and surprised at how miserable. I thought the severing act had freed me from him. I was wrong. I had abandoned him. My guilt was palpable.

That last verse began *Dearest Scotty, my brother*—the formality gone. I couldn't answer any of the questions I'd posed, but I wanted so much to bridge the divide between us.

SCOTT'S BODY WAS PREPARED for cremation (in accordance with my parents' wishes) and I drove to Weaverville for the Fourth of July holiday as planned—hoping to comfort my parents or get some of the comfort I found myself needing. His ashes were to be scattered atop Granite Peak in the wilderness of the Trinity Alps, not far from my parent's new home in Douglas City.

We cried—all of us. We shared memories, looked at pictures, perused his baby book. Laughed.

Remember when he was five, and dismantled that old clock of Mamo's? When he put it back together, it kept time okay, but chimed once at three o'clock and three times at one o'clock from then on. Remember?

He loved to take things apart, to see how they worked—remember the music box on my rocking chair that once played Brahms Lullaby?

Sometimes he'd tell people he was adopted because he didn't look like any of us. Did you know that?

Do you remember how he laughed while Uncle Chris read us Green Eggs and Ham? I think he was laughing at Uncle Chris' giggle, even more than the story.

Oh, and the Streetlamp Challenge—you didn't know about that? Remember when ...

The memories were painful and cathartic.

Where did we go wrong?

"At least we won't have to wonder," Daddy said, the thought incomplete, yet comprehensible. When next the phone rang, it wouldn't be because of my brother. There was no other shoe to drop.

How can relief be so painful?

MY PARENTS HAD RECEIVED a letter from Scott scant days before his death, mailed to the post-office box they'd used for years. The letter itself was dated June 17, but the postmark was June 23. Given its content, his delay in mailing was not a surprise.

Dear Mom & Dad,

Howdy! How's everything going? I went to Burbank a few weeks back to see Mamo 'cause she hadn't written for a month & 1/2 and got a bit worried. I did surprise her though. My bike is running well and I already have put 2500 miles on it! It's only been running a month & 3/4. As I told you in my previous letter I did have plans to come up north to visit but Mamo tells me you will move soon to Lori's property somewhere in the same area. I don't have the address or even know how to get there. Of course Mamo also informed me that it might not be a good idea for me to go up there because of the length of my hair. I certainly do not want to cause you folks any anxiety or bitterness so if you please let me know if it will affect our visit or not. I really don't want to change my plans but then again I don't want to cut my hair to see my parents. I mean it's been over 2 years.

Just let me know soon okay? I've fallen in love with this fox named Debbie and she has 4 kids—oh God!!!—but it's really been a very pleasant experience and I've never been Happier. Oh well life goes on. If I do come up I'd like to send my guitar up there U.P.S. since it will be hard to carry a guitar on a bike.

Hope everything is working out for all—but no one lets me know family business except Mamo so it's hard to know. Take care.

Love,

Scott

My first reaction may have been ludicrous: I was furious with Mamo. How dare she presume my parents wouldn't want to see Scott because of the length of his hair? Maybe if she'd offered him encouragement instead of caution, he would have been on his way to see my folks instead of lying dead after some stupid party.

However, once I calmed, I acknowledged my error. Any assumption that his appearance mattered to my parents was not farfetched. Mom had always been vocal about hating Scott's hair, especially when it was long. Or nonexistent. Or anything.

Mom denied that she would have sent him a rejection letter, but I have my doubts.

Part 5

Questing

“Yet my heart throbs to know one thing:”

— William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

Chapter 1

2006

I AM THE KEEPER OF THE family photographs. Boxes and boxes and boxes. More than a hundred years in thousands of pictures. They were the only inheritance I wanted from Mamo. Soon after she died (in 2000) my uncle mailed those boxes and boxes and boxes north. They sat in Mom's garage for a time, then mine for longer than that—until I cleared my calendar and began to sort. Some were brittle, some faded. Fortunately, most were good, clear, provocative. Some had names and years written on the backs, some did not. All were a jumble.

I set up one box for each branch of the family. One for my maternal ancestors, its content dating back to the Civil War. I had a nearly empty box for my mom's brother Doug and his family (for I suspect he sorted through and took the photos he wanted before forwarding them), and one for my little brother Grant and his family. There were scattered pictures of my dad's parents and his stepbrother Mitchell. Those latter ones went into the Grant Hart box, along with pictures when the Harts were young—including those of Scott, the broken branch of the family tree.

I sorted. When I didn't know the identity of the person in the picture, I asked Mom. If she didn't know, the picture was thrown away, for she and I were the last ones who would have

recognized anybody. Steadily, the contents of the boxes became organized.

Then I found it. It was one picture among the thousands. It had been taken with an Instamatic camera, not posed, color faded, image out of focus. It was Scott on his wedding day in 1979.

There were dozens of other pictures of Scott and JoAnn on that day—some taken with that same Instamatic, some with a Polaroid. Scott and JoAnn both looked happy, laughing and mugging, taking their vows, shoving cake in each other's faces, kissing and clowning like most couples do at their wedding.

This picture was different. He was in his tuxedo at the altar. The light was coming from behind, turning his wild blondish curls into an incongruous halo. I thought he looked wistful and defeated—not the emotions one would expect on a wedding day.

It was this photograph that spurred me to search once more for the brother who, by that time, had been dead for more years than he had lived. The boy with whom I shared a house and meals and vacations and holidays, but never understood. A boy I had once loved.

The need for closure is compelling.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER Scott's death, the terrain had changed. I wasn't sure where to begin to get the information I wanted. I wasn't even sure I knew why I wanted to start this search all over again. But I did.

Mom was still alive, although I couldn't be sure she would talk to me about my brother.

Daddy died of cancer four years after Scott's death. He was only fifty-five years old. At his request, his ashes were scattered atop Granite Peak, alongside his eldest son.

Grant had married, become a father of two children, divorced. He was floundering through life—not in the same way and never to the extent Scott had, but no less demoralizing for him. I was certain he would talk about Scotty.

I too had divorced, the year after Scott died. But my first husband had met Scott only that once at the Black Angus. So there was nothing I could have gleaned there even had I wanted—which I didn't.

All of my grandparents were gone, except Grampy (who would live to be 101). But both he and my Uncle Doug had been too removed to know much except what Mom may have told them. Dad's brother Mitchell was the same. My uncles would have little to tell me.

I had lost track of any and all of Scott's friends, his wife.

I knew so few remaining people who had known my brother.

After all the years, closure was going to take some perseverance.

I FOUND STEVE FIRST.

As I dug into Scotty's past, looking for his long-ago friends, I found a website called Classmates.com—where former students register under their respective schools, indicating the years they attended and/or graduated. The site was full of information, including a way to contact those registrants whose names were familiar.

There was Steve Kessler's name. I contacted him through the

site's form. He responded almost immediately and we scheduled a phone call.

Steve had lost track of Scott after the family's move north, due to a myriad of circumstances. Steve had married, had a child, divorced. He had remarried, again became a father, and was living in the Midwest, tuning pianos for a living—something he'd been doing since early adulthood. He'd worked with famous artists, like Johnny Mathis. He sounded content.

We talked until his memories of Scotty went dry. No, dry is not the word. There had been nothing dry about their friendship, their antics. Steve's fondness for my brother was still alive, passing unfiltered across the telephone lines.

Being with Scott had been exciting, he remembered. "He was so confident, without shame or remorse. He was intelligent, always moving and thinking of something to occupy the time. Maybe he had ADD or something?" Steve laughed.

They were the best of friends, and his affection for Scotty had not been lost through the years.

THEN CAME KELLY. On that same Classmates.com site was the name of Kelly's older brother, who I contacted just as I had Steve. The reply was rapid—and soon I had contact information for Scotty's first best friend.

Kelly, it seemed, had been searching for Scott for some time. Over the years, he looked for Scott's name in each new California town he happened to visit, perusing the phonebooks for my brother's name. If he came upon a prospect, he would call—but the Scott Hart of the directory never turned out to be the right one.

Kelly had become a lawyer—a surprising choice for someone who, by his own admission, had been a hell-raiser during his time with my brother, and long after Scotty moved away. He grew up “borrowing” cars when he wanted (from the tender age of thirteen on), purloined rifles from his parents to riddle construction sites with bullets, and raided the high-school cafeteria for frozen burritos (a special favorite) by entering through an unlocked skylight—justifying his thefts by chastising the school officials for not securing them properly. Kelly’s actions and infractions (and their frequency) sounded disturbingly familiar. However, unlike Scott, Kelly’s mischief never rose above the level of pranks.

Once, Kelly’s frustrated father had refused to rescue the teenager from an overnight stint in jail for drunk driving. So the officer in charge gave Kelly an option: sit on the bench all night handcuffed or go into the holding cell like other arrestees of the evening. When the officer also mentioned that the last occupant of the holding cell had thrown up and the smell still lingered, Kelly opted for the bench and handcuffs. At dawn he was issued a citation and freed.

Through it all, Kelly remained defiant and vocal with his parents—he didn’t care what they thought of him. He was going to do what he pleased for as long as he pleased, and told them so.

I have no memory, and nobody reported, that Scott had ever done the same with my parents. Even had he thought them, Scott had kept any defiant words to himself.

Drugs had never attracted Kelly, but sports had. Then, in his senior year of high school, Kelly discovered business law—and his energy found a new outlet. He finished high school, then

went on to complete college, was a deputy sheriff in Tahoe for three years, graduated from law school *cum laude*, top ten percent of his class, and passed the Bar, operating his own successful practice for years.

By Kelly's account during his turbulent years, the Watsons called upon physical punishments for their errant son far more brutal than anything doled out by the Harts. Where Scott had the controlled and moderated Belt, Kelly faced violent maternal outbursts of anger and blows from any handy object—too like the horrors visited upon my father by his mother and foster parents.

We spoke at length about then and now, facts and impressions, hits and misses. I verified my earliest memories of Scott and learned so much more. Mischief and misdeeds about which I previously knew little were vivid memories for Kelly. The partners had been closer than brothers, sharing ideas for trouble as freely and equally as they had candy. I sensed confidence in Kelly—and he had sensed that in Scott as well. He was sure of it.

Kelly was certain of one other thing, too. "I have nothing but fond memories of my early childhood playing with Scott. That's as it should be. I do remember that towards the end of our time in Granada Hills my mom would discourage me from playing with Scott. I understand that now. I remember not liking it at the time." Kelly went on to cultivate other friendships, but they were "nothing like the friendship I shared with Scott."

I was thrilled to know that Kelly had known real joy and excitement with his earliest "partner in crime."

THEN I TURNED TO BLOOD—my remaining family who had any memory of Scott.

I began with Grant—mostly because he still loved Scotty and his memories would have been positive, like Steve's and Kelly's. I was reveling in my new vision of Scott as seen through the hearts of his early mates—I didn't want that to vanish.

Grant was eager to talk about Scott—he wanted to set the record straight.

“He never introduced me to drugs. I did that on my own. This girl, Sharon, from junior high asked if I wanted to ‘turn on.’ I didn’t even know what that was. But I learned! Mom never believed me when I told her it wasn’t Scott. She was sure it was, and I couldn’t convince her otherwise.”

“She knew you were using drugs?”

“Yeah. Mom always seemed to know.”

“She remembers that Scott wouldn’t stick up for you when you were bullied.”

“I could take care of myself. I didn’t take bullying. As for Scott, I don’t remember him sticking up for me, but I never had the feeling he wouldn’t.”

“She thinks he picked on you.”

“I gave as good as I got. One time I was commuting between Stockton and Sunnyvale and Pleasant Hill—one of those winters when Pinewood Cove was in trouble and I had to get a job off the property. Well, it wasn’t a job—I was running marijuana. I needed a room, but was short on money. So Scott and JoAnn rented me one of their rooms and Scott took my guitar and amplifier for collateral. He and I got into a fist fight—I don’t remember why—and I hit him and split his lip.

He wouldn't hit me back. He tried to stop me from hurting him, but he wouldn't punch me back."

"What about the stealing? He tried to recruit Steve Kessler to go with him. Did he try to get you to do it?"

"After that time we got caught trying to steal fishing gear, I was never going to steal again. I was so scared, with the police and everything."

"Why do you think it scared you but not Scott?"

"I don't know. We were always different from one another."

"You mean you weren't 'just like Scott' like Mom always said?" I smiled, for I knew the answer.

"I hated when she said that. I kept telling her 'I'm not like Scott,' but she wouldn't listen. My whole life. After Dad died, she accused me of stealing his tools—did you know that?"

I nodded.

"I didn't steal his tools. I had no reason to. I had my own tools. But she wouldn't believe me. She didn't talk to me for a year after that."

"She and I had a fight, not too long ago," I said. "She stopped talking to me for about a year too. I knew she'd done that to you boys over the years, but I'd never before been the recipient."

"Yeah. Welcome to my world."

AT FIRST, MOM WAS reluctant to talk about Scott, as I'd expected. "You seem to be looking for someone to blame," she cried.

"No Mom," I assured her. "I'm looking for answers."

I was telling the truth, but only half of it. I was suspicious—no, terrified—I would find someone to blame.

When it finally happened, when I finally convinced her to talk, we were at it for hours. Reminiscing. Laughing. Crying. Such had always been our habit whenever we got together—but in the years since his death the subject had seldom been Scott.

We relived the grieving stages yet again—for Scott, of course, but for Daddy too.

“Scott couldn’t lie to me. I’d put two-and-two together and then confront him with something—and he’d confess. But there were times when he told me the bad things he’d done without my asking. Told me! Like I wanted to hear such things. Then do you know what he’d say? ‘Don’t tell Daddy.’ Don’t tell Daddy! It was okay that I knew about his misdeeds, but God forbid your father should know.”

“Maybe he was more afraid of Daddy than he was of you.”

“Lucky me.”

“I was always more afraid of Daddy than I was of you. You were Roaring Chicken, remember? Vocal but harmless.”

Our memories bounced in free form, without rhyme but with great reason. I didn’t insist that she only talk about Scott, for I wanted to look below the surface, beyond the obvious.

“Daddy loved you so much, you know,” she said. “I’d catch him staring at the picture he kept on his desk. He’d have the most loving look on his face. That’s when he’d say, ‘I miss Lori’ or something equally as tender. Every time someone would comment on how pretty you were in that photo, he’d beam with pride. He’d tell them you were beautiful inside, too. But he’d never say a word to you.

“He wouldn’t talk about his feelings. One time when we were fighting—I think it may have been on Edmonton—I accused him of not loving me, because he’d never told me so. Do you

know what his response was? ‘Of course I love you. I’m here, aren’t I?’

“He wouldn’t talk to the boys about sex. He asked me to do it because he said I was better with words than he was. You know, Scotty’s counsellor told me it should have been your dad talking, even if he’d been crude about it. Or wrong. Boys need their fathers. Your father was never there for the boys.”

“He never played baseball or football with them, did he?”

“He never had time.”

Most of these memories I’d heard before—both good and bad.

“I think he would have been better off with Julie instead of me.” Julie was the woman whose name had been obscured beneath the panther-head tattoo on Daddy’s arm. “She was wild. He was always attracted to wild.”

“He wasn’t having an affair with Julie when Grant was born, though, was he?”

“No. When I was pregnant with you and then Scott, I suspect it was Julie. But with your little brother, it was some waitress he’d just met when he was in El Paso. He told me she meant nothing to him, as if that made it alright.

“I shouldn’t have married him. He never left the boy Marine behind. Do you know six months after our wedding he told me he wasn’t in love anymore? I didn’t know what to do. I loved him so much.”

She cried for a time, the sting from a half-century wound still smarting.

I steered the conversation as gently as I could without backing away from the pain. “You stayed mad at him a long time after Grant was born. I can tell from the pictures of us at that

lake—the summer when Grant was a baby, maybe six months old. You looked sullen. You never hid that well, you know.”

“When he took us to that lake, I was frightened. I thought he wanted to drown us all—you, your brothers, and me.” I feared she may have been watching too many movies like *A Place in the Sun*. Mom loved movies.

“He wouldn’t have done that, Mom.”

“I wasn’t that certain.”

“How did you feel when Scotty first started to misbehave?”

“It was like living with my father all over again. I could never trust that man—and here was my boy doing the same things the old man had done.”

“He wasn’t that different from other kids, you know. I stole a candy bar from JJ Newberry’s once. I wasn’t caught, but I felt guilty about it, even years later. I thought about going back, before we moved up north, and leaving a nickel on the counter anonymously.”

She shook her head. “I guess I didn’t know my children very well. But, why couldn’t Scotty have felt guilty?”

“I was old enough to know better. Scott was much younger when he stole that money from Mamo. Maybe he hadn’t learned yet. Kids aren’t born knowing the rules.”

ADA BULL WASN’T FAMILY—but she was close. She had certainly been something of a mother to Scott in the years we lived on Edmonton, when she and George hired him to work for them, and again before he was returned to CYA. At his second arrest, he asked her to stand in court with him because he needed “somebody to cry for me.”

Ada was anxious to talk about Scott.

"Ah Scotty," she said as we sat in her living room. There was grief and love in the sigh of those words, similar to what I heard in Kelly's voice, in Steve's. "Ah Scotty."

"Good. Someone should tell his story," she said, when I told her the purpose of my quest. "It's a story that needs to be told," was her response when I asked why.

"Once I found out about all of his troubles, I tried to talk to your mom. She didn't want to talk about him—but she did say that he was like the Werewolf—a good boy until a full moon. Not that he was affected by the moon literally, but I knew what she meant."

"There were some strange incidents over the years, but I always dismissed them. One time I was taking a bath and, when I looked up, Scott was standing in the hallway staring at me. Buck naked I was. I don't know why he was in the house or how he got in—but I was so startled at having been caught nude, I didn't think to ask him.

"When he was twelve or so, he borrowed a bracelet I had that was made from Cuban coins. Said he was studying Cuba in school and wanted to show it. He had been fascinated by the bracelet for some time. Years later, it disappeared. By then I'd learned his background, so I suspect he may have taken it.

"We talked about all sorts of things. He was always so sweet, so polite—but never really happy. Not angry, exactly, but certainly not happy.

"He once told me that your mom had stripped him down naked and beat him under the shower. I believed him. I tried to test your mom after that, to make her slip up and confess—but

she never did. Finally I just came out and told her what he'd said—and her jaw dropped. I knew then it wasn't true. She didn't even have to deny it—which she did, of course—but I could tell by her reaction that no such thing had ever happened. I didn't always believe the things he said after that.

"He worked for us at the screen shop for several months, before his big troubles began. He was a good worker. I never had to check his work—it was always perfect. Your dad taught him that. Always the perfectionist.

"I used to let him drive us to work in my car in the mornings—I think he still only had his permit at that time, but he was anxious to drive. I'd buy him cigarettes. I know your parents didn't want him smoking, but they smoked. And I smoked. How could we stop him?

"One morning on the way to the shop, he asked to stop at the apartment of a friend briefly. So I waited in the car. He wasn't gone long. Afterward, we continued onto work. I later learned he had stolen from them.

"One time I was in my office counting the receipts from the day before. He dropped in. I don't remember what we talked about, but after he left, I was sure I was missing \$20 from one of the stacks. He came back a little while later—and had bought lunch for us all. Gobs of food. When I asked where he'd gotten the money, he just glared at me. I knew he didn't have money that day—that may have been one of the days I bought him cigarettes.

"That frightened me—he'd never looked at me like that before. I called the police, to ask them what I should do. I had no real proof, so I wasn't trying to get him arrested. But

I knew we had to fire him. I wanted some advice from the officer, I guess.

“Well the officer asked some questions, including his name. Then he said he was familiar with Scott Hart. The entire Sunnyvale police department was familiar with Scott Hart, apparently.

“He suggested that George be the one to fire him, because he might hurt me if I did it—I thought maybe there was something in his file that suggested he hated women. I don’t know if that was true, but I felt better asking George to do it anyway. Scott had scared me. And you know me … I’m not afraid of much. It was like he was someone I didn’t know.”

I had never experienced that with my brother, and said so.

“He never seemed happy. After that scare at the shop, I called the psychology department at Stanford, just to see what I could learn about him—in a general kind of way. I don’t remember the name of the person I talked to, but I told him about Scott—everything I could remember about his behavior, how he never hung his head about anything. Well, the Stanford person said he couldn’t know without talking with Scott, but he sounded like a person without conscience, narcissistic, without loyalty. A sociopath, he said. “Nobody knows the cause and there’s nothing anybody can do about a person like that,” he said. He told me Scott should probably be locked up and the key thrown away.

“I thought maybe he was messed up because your parents were so strict with him. He never complained about either of your parents, except that lie about your mom, but I knew what a perfectionist your dad was. I thought they were both pretty rough on him.”

Ah, there it was—the blame I wanted to avoid. Neither Kelly or Steve had looked to assign blame. I had skirted the issue with Grant and denied it with Mom. However, Ada was always the straightforward type.

“They were stricter with Grant and me. But we turned out okay.”

“Yes you did. So, I don’t know then.” Ada shook her head.
“Ah, Scotty.”

I ALMOST GAVE UP TRYING to track down anybody else. I could find no reference to any of Scott’s counsellors except the name “Roger Smith” in one of my mom’s letters. Do you know how many Roger Smiths there are in California? I hadn’t a clue how to identify which Roger Smith might be the right one or how to find him. Even had I done so, I wasn’t sure a counsellor could break his confidentiality oath even after a death.

I knew that Scott’s wife JoAnn continued to visit Mamo long after Scott’s death. She had remarried, had a son named Michael—there were pictures of the two of them with Mamo among the boxes of photos in my collection. I knew JoAnn’s maiden name and could deduce her approximate age. I hoped that was enough to start.

Using the same search engine on the Internet that had failed me with Roger Smith, I culled names of possible candidates using what little I remembered of the girl Scotty had called his wife.

I found a possibility—and penned a letter: *I am looking for a woman who was briefly married to Scott M. Hart in the late '70s-early '80s in California. Given some information I was able*

to ascertain from the Web, I am hopeful that I have found her, in you, at last. If you are that woman, please read on; if not, then I apologize for having wasted your time.

I provided additional validation of who I was and why I was searching for the elusive JoAnn—then gave contact information, in case I'd hit the jackpot.

I had. Less than a month after I mailed the letter, I received a reply via email and began a correspondence with the woman who had once loved my brother. We agreed to meet: in the town where she lived, on a certain date, certain time, in the lobby of a hotel not far from where she worked.

The day our meeting was scheduled, I was anxious. My confidence waxed and waned. I was afraid she wouldn't show. I was afraid that, if she did, she would hate me and my parents for abandoning her after Scott's death. I feared she would tell me things I didn't want to know. I feared she wouldn't tell me anything.

But she had agreed. So I hoped.

I tapped my foot, darting anxious glances at the hotel's entrance. Would I recognize her if she did come? We had met only once at The Black Angus, twenty-seven years before. I'd seen pictures, of course, but those too had been twenty-seven years old—and she had been nineteen at the time.

Then she was there. Not much different from the pictures, really. JoAnn walked into the lobby, spotted me—and smiled. I was relieved.

We exchanged the usual pleasantries, reminiscent of that night at the Black Angus—a lifetime ago. Then we found a quiet corner booth in the restaurant for breakfast.

"Why are you digging into this, after all these years?" The

question was direct, but friendly. She had asked the same in her original email. Its repetition was no surprise.

I gave my standard answer: “I’m writing a book about him.”

“But why? It’s been so long.”

I hesitated. “Guilt, I suppose. He was my brother—and I abandoned him.”

She nodded, accepting my confession with grace. Then she began to talk, to reminisce. I had to ask few questions. She seemed to want to talk. She confirmed her love for a boy I’d left behind. The boy she would eventually leave behind, too.

We spent an hour together. I seldom had to prompt—she had no reticence telling me both the good and the bad. Most of her memories were pleasant, but not all. Even the bad she tackled without hesitation. She was delightful.

“Do you have any questions for me?” That was how I closed all of my business meetings—not quite appropriate in this scenario, but I didn’t think about that until later. JoAnn seemed to have run out of memories, and we needed to wrap things up. She was due for work. I had lots of notes, lots of things to digest.

It was a surprise when she softly said, “Yes.”

I shifted in my seat for a longer stay.

“What happened in El Paso?”

My lips tingled a little. I laced my hands in front of me.
“What do you mean?”

“Well, my parents lived close to us, so we saw them all the time—especially since Scott worked for my dad. We often spent time with Mamo. But we hadn’t seen your folks since right after the wedding, at the resort. So, sometimes, I’d suggest we drive up to visit them.

“But whenever I did, Scott would fly into a rage. He yelled and ranted about hating your dad, not wanting to see him. He said he didn’t want to go because of what had happened in El Paso. Did you ever live in El Paso?”

I shook my head, took a sip of water.

Scotty couldn’t have remembered El Paso himself—could he? He’d been too small at the time. Even if he had the same sense memories I did, he wouldn’t have known that city name. Mom had never talked to him about El Paso—I asked her. Dad would never have spoken to him—he spoke so seldom anyway. It had to have been Mamo who provided the details—and then only after his marriage. Prior to that, he hadn’t caused a ruckus nor refused to see my folks.

No, Mamo had to have been the person who told him the story of El Paso—and I could only imagine what spin she might have given the tale.

I nodded to JoAnn, and began the story as I knew it—as I’d heard from my mother, as I’d pieced together from my memories, from the traces cast over the years. El Paso: a remote city the mention of which could spark a rampage in my brother, ferocious enough for his widow to recall thirty-five years after his death.

Chapter 2

1958

IN EARLY JANUARY OF 1958, Daddy was in El Paso, Texas, to begin another phase of testing on a new, top-secret missile project on which he'd been working for years—Polaris. I learned the name only later—he was forbidden from telling anyone even the project name.

At the time, I was in kindergarten, adjusting well to school and as self-centered and independent as most five-year-olds can be.

Three-year-old Scotty missed his daddy. He was as happy as a puppy when Daddy was home—and despondent with any separation. That love and attachment was so strong that Mom had noted it in his baby book.

Even before Daddy left, Mom was having a difficult time. She was more than eight-months pregnant and feeling every pound of it. She had not lost much of the weight from her previous pregnancies and, as her due date approached, was physically suffering.

Her discomfort notwithstanding, Mom prepared for the birth. Mamo would be responsible for driving Mom to the hospital when the time came. Eventually, she would be the one to bring Mom and my new little brother or sister home. Even after that, she would live at our house for a time, helping

with the myriad of chores and activities that defined the Hart household—until Daddy's return.

What Mamo didn't think she could handle were *two* youngsters at once. My schedule required shuttling back and forth from school every day. I'd need breakfasts prepared, lunches packed, clothes laundered (I was dressing myself and tying my own shoes, but still...). Scotty wasn't in school—and while Mamo loved him most dearly, she knew his energy level required constant attention and supervision. So, when she went into labor, Scotty was going to stay with Mimi and Grampy until everything settled.

Mom had thought of everything possible in preparation for this baby. In those weeks before her due date, she was ready. Anxious, but ready.

That was before a phone call to my dad one evening, prior to the birth.

Daddy had a roommate in El Paso. Lockheed may have been high on the government's go-to suppliers, but they weren't in the habit of wasting money on separate hotel rooms for traveling engineers. So when my mom called to talk with Daddy one evening, the roommate was the one who answered.

"Hello. Can I speak to Grant?"

"He's already on his way," the roommate said. "He'll be there in a few minutes."

Heart pounding, Mom hung up the phone. She may have thrown a cursory "thank you" his way before hanging up, but she couldn't recall. What she did remember was numbness and hurt and fear. Since he was in El Paso, nearly 1,000 miles away, Dad wasn't going to be with *her* in a few minutes. That meant he was on his way to see someone else, someone not his wife,

but someone whose feminine voice had not been a surprise to his roommate.

Mom was devastated.

The woman my father was on his way to see that night turned out to be a waitress at a local El Paso diner. When ultimately confronted, he claimed the affair meant nothing. Mom didn't care—it meant something to her.

Mom's fury enveloped her—just as it had after Scotty's birth (for the same reason). To those around her, she was polite in a studied kind of way, frighteningly controlled, horribly quiet, and fuming. The air in our house crackled. I felt it, as I always could. I suspect three-year-old Scotty could, too.

On Thursday January 23rd, with this brittle storm raging through our lives, after thirty-six hours of labor, my brother Grant was born.

My father flew home to meet his new son, only to depart soon thereafter for the remainder of his stint in El Paso. I suspect, even had Lockheed not mandated his presence, he would have returned to El Paso post haste.

And Scotty was miserable. Three days after Grant's birth, an inconsolable Scott was returned to us—Mimi and Grampy could do nothing to calm the screaming child. He wanted Daddy, but if he couldn't have that, the comfort of home and the rest of his family would have to do. The little guy wanted his life back.

Except for that brief visit to welcome his newest son, Dad wouldn't return home from his assignment until April of that year.

Mom stayed in her self-imposed stew during his absence and long after his ultimate return, well into the summer.

Chapter 3

2015

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

I long suspected the circumstances surrounding my little brother's birth might have contributed to Scott's troubles, but until that fortuitous question from JoAnn its significance had remained only an inkling. Had it not been for her timely query, El Paso would have been nothing more than a brief anecdote in the annals of Hart history. Even then, however, the impact of circumstances on my little brother remained only a theory.

El Paso might have been a bomb in Scotty's life, the ever-shifting sands of my parents' relationship his perpetual minefield, my father's dry aloofness, Mom's niggling fears and prejudices the IEDs of his youth. Post-traumatic stress disorder caused by a domestic battle. He certainly displayed the usual symptoms of PTSD: self-destructive behavior, the need to self-medicate, a dearth of impulse control, a wavering moral compass.

However, I will never know. Over the years, I had come to suspect El Paso as the beginning of Scotty's troubles—an incident that neither Grant nor I had experienced the same way Scott had. But I had no proof.

My theory was as good as any other, I suppose: Steve's ADD speculation; the Jekyll-and-Hyde of JoAnn's experience; Ada's

vision of an oppressed child with demanding parents or, worse, the sociopath about which she was warned. Who knew? Mine was a plausible theory about my brother's behavior, but nothing more. Sure, I gave my hypothesis more credence because I had known him longer than any of the others, was closer to him than the others, had done my research.

I had put the puzzle pieces neatly into place. Yet still I had nothing. The only person who could have verified any of the myriad of hypotheses was Scott—and he was gone.

We each had our own portrait of a young man—but nothing was to say if any of us had the definitive picture or that we were all wrong.

Even were any of us right, nothing could be done or undone—Scott's behavior was now immutable.

Strangely, knowing which theory was right or wrong had lost its importance. Somewhere along this journey, I had stopped asking *What was wrong with Scotty?*

Telling Scotty's story turned out to be harder than I anticipated. I wasn't prepared for the pain. Writing is an arduous process under normal circumstances, but reliving hard memories and exposing warts on loved ones is excruciating. For several years after my 2006 interviews, I started and stopped and stumbled over how to present Scott's tale without laying blame. The potential was there—and ultimately immutable as well.

“Whatever happened to that story you were writing about Scotty?” was a frequent question from those who had opened their hearts to me about my brother. They couldn't know how difficult it had become.

I feared I wouldn't complete the tale—and I feared that, when I did, too many people would be hurt.

Still, I wrote. For, as Ada noted, his was a story that needed telling—not because there was a conclusion to the tale or a moral to be taught or anything unique. Instead, it became a story for my redemption—a tale of cleansing and acceptance and sympathy.

For the first time in decades, I was able to see Scott through the tender eyes of others. I came to experience him not as someone to wipe from my memory, but simply as a battered soul beneath an angel's face. The wistful and defeated young man in a wedding photo: *Dearest Scotty, my brother.*

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I want to thank the Bull family, especially Ada—may her soul rest in peace alongside her beloved George. She believed in Scott and offered him untold opportunities for redemption. She was a remarkable woman of goodness.

After that, where do I start?

Perhaps I need most to thank the people who loved Scotty unconditionally:

Kelly Watson and Steve Kessler, to whom I dedicated this book because of their steadfastness and openness and pleasure in my brother.

To JoAnn, who cast Scotty a lifeline. That he may have had a lax grip does not diminish her effort. I thank her for the

willingness to open herself to me—the deliberate stranger to whom she was briefly related.

And to my youngest brother Grant, who remembers and defends Scott with a love that has never faltered. I love my “baby” brother, and always will.

Then I must acknowledge Mamo, rest her soul, who I have yet to really forgive. I know she was as much a product of her upbringing as my brothers and I, and as much as my own parents were of theirs. She must have suffered, too—I know that. I want to accept that knowledge into my heart someday. I owe her that, as my grandmother.

I thank Daddy, too soon gone. Who I love and will always love: despite his faults, despite his thoughtless acts, despite his distance. I love him for his tenacity, his deliberate choice to cast away The Belt, the kindness and love he lavished on animals but too often hid from humans (in protection of his fragile self, I know). I love him. I miss him.

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About the Author

Lori Hart Beninger is a native Californian, residing in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband and a circle of friends, family, and goofy pets—all of whom contribute to her writing in some form or another. *An Ordinary Tragedy* is Ms. Beninger's third book, but her first foray into the realm of non-fiction.

Other works:

Embracing the Elephant (August 2012)

A Veil of Fog and Flames (March 2015)