
STRAWBERRY RHUBARB PIE

[A Family Gathering Mystery]

The best place to hide a family secret is in plain sight.

David Marshall Hunt

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ASIN: B0979T571B

ISBN-13: 978 0 9894687 0 1

Library of Congress Control Number: processing.

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Chapter 1

3:15 am SAST, March 21, 1992, Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

The persistent ringing of a telephone is disturbing my sleep. I am not sure if it's real or part of a dream. I live in a rented cottage thousands of miles from where I was born. My life is that of a wanderer, never developing a feeling that where I rest my head is home. It's been my experience late-night calls are from someone who forgets to check the time zone difference before calling or heaven forbid; they foreshadow disaster.

A disturbing nightmare invades my restless sleep and mingles with the persistent ringing. The figure appears of a handsome yet ghostly white-haired, grey-eyed woman in her seventies, dressed in a threadbare cotton nightgown. She struggles to reach the telephone on the nightstand next to her bed. Her withered left arm reaches for the receiver, her trembling fingers miss, and it tumbles to the floor. She sighs in frustration and moves to turn on the lamp. It falls, entangling with the cord. She attempts to rise and put on her slippers. She untangles the phone and is dialing the numbers to call someone.

Her lips are mouthing the words, "Daniel Matthew, it's mom!"

Twisting my bedsheets into a knot, I'm sweating as the ringing persists. Some sounds are comforting to me. The gong of the great Silla bell in South Korea, the rhythmic calls to prayer from the minarets of mosques in the Emirates and Karachi, church bells from St. James Cathedral in Seattle, all are familiar. But I sense that the unrelenting sound I'm hearing or dreaming about is a harbinger of distressing news.

Calls from overseas don't always come through to South Africa during the monsoon season. My habit is to let my phone ring several times before picking it up. Besides, I'm renting this place, and I get a dozen calls a day for the previous tenant.

This morning, my dream-state couples with a hangover, magnifying the volume and annoyance of the rings.

I attempt to mute the sound by covering my head with a pillow, hiding from the disturbing images of mom's struggles.

The ringing intensifies and awakens me at 3:20 am SAST. I struggle out of bed, grab the receiver from the night-table, and admonish the caller.

"Do you know what the time is?"

"Little brother... sad news... mom died... sleep last night," a familiar voice says as static crackles between Yuma and Johannesburg disrupting the call.

"Daniel, are you there?"

"Yes, I'm here," I say. "I spoke with mom last Friday. She apologized for missing my birthday by a day, but she seemed fine."

He reports that the Yuma County medical examiner gave a preliminary determination of a heart attack, cardio something or other.

More static breaks up his words, then he says, "The landlord called the police about an hour ago, and they found mom laying on the floor with the receiver buzzing."

I struggle to distinguish dream from reality.

"They will cremate her remains as she wished," Jer says, "There are no plans for a memorial of any kind."

I'm relieved that I won't need to be at the service. But upset at not having a role in the last act of my mother's existence.

"I'll check with my secretary about catching a flight back from Joburg to Seattle, then shuttle over to Spokane."

"That'll put you at the Jonson farm in a few days," he says. "I'll meet you there, and we'll bury mom's ashes in the cemetery next to Grandpa and Grandma, daughter Esther, and brother Paul."

After Jer hangs up, I continue to muse over my disturbing dream. It occurred only moments before my brother's call. Was my nightmare the last communication between my mother and me, her youngest son?

Once a month I have dutifully called mom, but that's the extent of my connecting with relatives. I have distanced myself from family responsibilities as I drift around the globe. It's a year since I spoke to my older brother and longer since I went stateside. The lure of overseas experience is intoxicating and the work fulfilling.

Huckleberry Finn ran away from home to find adventure. As did I. The challenge of finding the road back is hard for a wanderer. Ask my mom. Change that, ask any expatriate, they'll explain what I mean.

I haven't thought of family to this extent for years, but my first recall is troubling. Mom's death triggers a disturbing childhood memory that rattles around in my head. Near the end of the War in the Pacific, we paid our last respects to Paul, my favorite storytelling uncle. It was the earliest

death of a beloved one that I experienced. At 13, I took it hard as I was Uncle Paul's apprentice. Every day I completed my chores about the farm as a child, but my most meaningful role was apprentice storyteller.

Jer thinks of me as a hermit, and perhaps he's right, I am narcissistic. My focus on self is troubling me, a product of my career and my three decades of living abroad. I'm disturbed by my dodging of family responsibilities.

My name is Daniel Matthew Jonson, a 61-year-old American of Swedish ancestry. My lifelong passion for running and mountain biking keeps me lean and fit. My hair and beard are grey as befits my station and stage in life. I'm a Visiting Professor of International Business History at the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) Graduate School at the Parktown Campus in Johannesburg (Joburg).

South Africa is suffering from debilitating global trade sanctions, internal political turmoil, and a staggering 60 percent unemployment rate. Mine work is a primary source of employment. It's hazardous. Lung disease is common among laborers in gold and diamond mines over a mile beneath the earth's surface. Living in stark barracks, far from families, is a sorry fate. I focus my research on these working conditions and the miner's compensation and morale.

Traveling and pursuing adventure in exotic lands is an essential aspect of my profession as an international business scholar. I meet people of varied cultural backgrounds and values and assist them in improving their employment practices. To travel is to learn, and as I expand my knowledge, I share what I have experienced.

My university salary is adequate, but I pay a price in terms of infrequent returns to the states and the home of my childhood. I limit my family visits to Christmas holidays or summers between academic semesters.

Devoting my past 25 years to lecturing and researching at universities around the world has taken me far from the center of my upbringing in Spokane's River Valley in eastern Washington. On the rare occasions of my stateside visits, my mom often reminds me I possess the look of a wanderer in my blue-gray eyes. She is the only one who calls me Daniel Matthew.

Two months of monsoon rains just ended, and it's time to leave the gymnasium and resume my outdoor running routine. Yesterday I ran in a 15-kilometer race with a group of my graduate students. It exhausted me. We celebrated a bit too much at the pub in the rear of Mike's Kitchen. Carling's Black Label Lager has done me in more than once.

From time to time, I assess where I am and where I come from, and why am I doing whatever I'm doing. As the details of the sad and shocking nightmare and the pursuant reality set in, I

sense that it's necessary for me to step back and take stock. It's been some while since my last deep introspection. I'll need some help in doing this.

7:05 am SAST, March 22, 1992, Johannesburg, South Africa

My thoughts of the dream and death of mom and memories of my childhood and Uncle Paul are haunting me when a second call comes from Yuma the next morning. The ringing is less persistent, and the hour doesn't matter because I haven't slept since the nightmare.

"Jonson, Stanhope, & Houseman attorneys at law, Mary here, is this Daniel?"

"Hi Mary, yes, it's me, good to hear your voice," I say, recalling that Mary has been Jer's legal secretary for two decades.

"You too, Daniel," Mary says, "hold for Jerry, please."

"There's no urgent reason for you to return, stateside," Jer says. "I believe mom is at peace. There isn't anything you can do here until we get together with Sara Swenson, mom's lawyer up in Spokane."

Again, I feel a twinge of disappointment at not having a role to play at mom's interment.

"I remember Sara," I say, "the lady who wears the big sunhats, even in the winter."

"That's her, and she wants us to determine what happens next at the auction of the Jonson homestead."

"Auction!" I say, startled at the thought of selling the hub of our childhood to strangers.

"Sara said that mom left packages with her and instructed that you and I open them together at the farm."

"What's that about?"

"Your guess is as good as mine."

Reflecting on family is filling my head with events and relatives I haven't thought of for years. We once numbered over fifty members of varied ethnicities living in the Pacific Northwest. Since WWII we scattered far and wide. I left the home of my childhood and gradually became a loner and a wanderer during my decades of international adventures.

Mom worked hard over the years to stay in communication with our scattered relatives. Jer is a year older than me, and we shared many an adventure as children on the farm. Before the War, we used to have Christmas gatherings for the entire clan. Mom, Jer, and I were present at our last

family gathering during December 1941 when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. We lost Paul and three adopted members, Charlee Sang, Franklin Yoshino, and Tinya Yoshino, vanished between 1941 and 1945. I've not spoken these names for fifty years, but they come into my thoughts, in a manner that is unnerving.

Jer has shouldered most of the responsibility while raising children of his own. Perhaps it's my turn to do something for the family, but what?

The more I think about family, the more I feel guilt. This perception of guilt seems rooted in my childhood. Spent mostly at the Jonson's farm in the Spokane River Valley. Fragments of stories have popped into my dreams, but not for years. Family gatherings at the homestead for Christmas were special events. My brother and I stealing one of grandma's pies. Can't forget Grandpa's willow switch. Paul made the university rowing team. Paul was the family storyteller and I recall that he loved to tell scary stories from atop Big Black Rock. I try to make sense of it all, but details escape my grasp.

My childhood recollections of home lie buried beneath layers of my adventures abroad. Exotic sights and career relocations to many countries in Africa, the middle east, and Southeast Asia are my resume. Kenya's lush tea and coffee lands in Kericho and the splendors of the Masai Mara. The escarpments of South Africa and the waterfalls known in Afrikaans as the Witwatersrand. The city of Johannesburg grew during a late 19th-century gold rush. Mountainous piles of yellow slag bear testimony to the waste, perhaps serving as monuments to the difference in wealth and poverty.

All these contemporary memories are of people and places in distant lands, not part of an auction or my childhood. But the images that haunt me are not only about mom's death, but about the man I admired most as a boy. I loved my Uncle Paul, the rower, the sailor, the adventurer, the storyteller who took me under his wing as his apprentice, he was my mom Connie's youngest brother. I haven't thought about him for decades.

An hour after Jer's second call, I stuff some student papers I've been grading into my backpack and lock up my rental cottage. I live on a quiet residential side street between the Technikon and Hillbrow Tower in Johannesburg's Parktown district. It's the first week after the rainy season, and I start out the front door on my trek to the campus. My lecture in the Bert Wessels Building starts in two hours.

As I latch the gate, the phone rings again. I wish someone would invent a way to block unwanted calls.

The ringing seems less persistent, but the devastating news of the previous call prompts me to turn around and reenter the cottage.

A fourth ring sounds. Before going to bed last night, I reset the answering machine to take over after the fourth ring with a recorded message.

"You reached the party you dialed, if urgent, leave your name and number and I'll call back, if not, enjoy your day."

"It's me," I say as I recognize the caller's resonant tone.

"Hi, Daniel!" Claire says, "Jer just called me with the news about your mom. I'm so sad. How are you holding up?"

Earlier I said that I'd turned into a loner, that's not accurate. I have a select few compatriots. Claire Parsons is more than a close friend and colleague; she's my main squeeze. She is a professor in the Department of Anthropology at Washington University in Seattle. A brilliant researcher and a sought-after speaker on topics of vanished civilizations and lost persons. She also has a doctorate in clinical psychology and maintains a small private practice. When I'm confronted by personal challenges help often comes in the form of this gorgeous and insightful woman.

"Sometimes, a journey to the past reveals why you behave the way you do in the present," Claire says.

I have lived abroad most of my life, and I recognize that I see things from a changed perspective whenever I return home. An example being how I see elements of the ghetto suburb of Soweto in America's cities. Homeless persons on park benches and living under sheets of cardboard or beneath highway overpasses. Piles of garbage and a lack of medical clinics. Schools with their windows broken. These are the attributes of sections of Pacific coast cities from San Diego to Seattle. My lens changes with every overseas experience and adventure. Poverty and wealth, beauty and waste often are separated by a single street or railroad track or lake.

When I'm stateside in the summers, Claire and I run through the grounds of Washington Park Arboretum near her hilltop home in Seattle's Parkside district. It is an example of the beauty and wealth that exists. Not far to the south is Nickelsville, an unauthorized tent city on the Duwamish Waterway.

Geographic distance has long been a challenge to our relationship. Our careers and 8,000 miles separate us. It isn't the most intimate arrangement to have with one's main squeeze. We remain close despite geographic distance. Her fiery love of life matches her flaming red hair, unless it's blonde or brunette depending on her mood and her matching outfit.

"I wish I could be with you," Claire says, her soft, gravelly voice a soothing balm.

"I know how much you and your brother loved and respected your mom," she says. "Jer conveyed that you plan to finish your stint at WITS and said something about a marathon with someone named Dawselle. He also asked me to persuade you that there is no need to rush home."

I'm finishing the story about my terrifying dream when we lose our Seattle to Joburg connection. A thunderstorm drenches the city, and me thinking the stormy season is over. The phone crackles back on, and they restore the line.

"That nightmare has me wrestling with fragments of memories of Uncle Paul, who returned from The Philippines in 1945 and died shortly before the fighting ended."

"That must have been a painful experience," Claire says, "the death of someone you loved."

"Resurrecting events of my childhood is adding to my feelings of guilt," I say. "Could it be the shock of auctioning off our family home?"

"I understand the grief, but why the guilt?"

"Because I've been running away from family responsibility for decades."

Claire lets this pass without comment.

The lights in my Joburg cottage flicker and go out, and our call gets cut off. I grab a flashlight and check the utility room behind the kitchen and flip and reset the circuit breakers.

Ten minutes later, the storm has blown past, and they reconnect us.

"Let's take stock before we discuss more about the fragments of your heritage," Claire says.

My grasp of home and love of family has changed over the times, and the way back to them, in distance and time, requires me to return.

She senses that my depression runs deeper than the nightmare of mom's death, mingling with the demise of Uncle Paul. There is a greater connection. The auction is upsetting; but she suspects there's something buried deep in my memory-attic that exaggerates my sense of guilt.

"We must get to the source of the guilt," she says, "and determine why it dates to your childhood, then we need a treatment plan."

If it were anyone other than Claire, I would have hung up, but I respect her professional skills and I listen to her excellent advice.

The Journal of Ancient Cultures and Antiquities published her research into the disappearance in the islands of the South Pacific Ocean of the famous aviatrix Amelia Earhart. Now she's doing

research that involves the 50th anniversary of EO9066. The executive order that incarcerated over 100,000 Japanese during WWII. President Bush just issued a public apology to these American citizens of Japanese heritage for the nation's folly. That apology sparked her investigation into the fate of imprisoned Japanese Americans, many from the Seattle/Tacoma area where she works and lives. Their land and property are not being restored to them since their release from the camps in 1945. Compensation is being considered.

"This week, I'm putting the finishing touches to the first part of my latest investigation project."

"I have a proposal for you, Daniel," she says. "I'll get a colleague to cover my last two weeks of classes. Then I'll fly to Johannesburg. We'll work on finding some answers together?"

"You can join our running team," I say. "Our favorite trail takes in some local sights including the planetarium and the zoo."

"Can we take one of those hot-air balloon rides over Kruger National Park?" she says. "You'll break my heart if you say no."

"You're teasing," I say, sensing and visualizing a twinkle in the emerald flecks of her slate-grey eyes.

All I hear is her laughter, then comes another power failure. The line goes dead. I wait for it to ring. I'm thinking, how can the phone company call to tell me the lines are down?

I'm also thinking about how much Claire means to me.

Her call has sent a breath of fresh air sweeping through the cottage. For a moment, I feel I won't have to make it through this guilt and grief on my own. She is right about my distress, but I have my research, lecturing, and classes, and my training with Dawselle for the Comrades to take my mind off my miseries. Meanwhile, I need to get to WITS for the morning run and my lecture.

Chapter 2

Running is a passion of mine. Over the next two weeks, I average 50 miles a week. To run is to feel free, a time to think creatively. I run daily with a small group of my students, led by Dawselle Webber, my graduate assistant, and an accomplished distance runner.

My days begin with a brisk run with team Dawselle. Her team is doing fartlek runs, intervals and sprints, mixed in with lots of hills, aimed at getting us into the best condition of our lives. She is in the last stages of training for the forthcoming Olympics in Barcelona. The Comrades is an ultra-marathon race that attracts a field of thousands of runners to South Africa. She is running to further establish her qualifications with the RSA Olympic committee. Dawselle waves at a group of four runners as they glide past us near the zoo; they are world caliber athletes.

"That's Bruce Fordyce, he's won the Comrades nine times," Dawselle says, "he'll be one of the favorites for the men this year."

"I need two runners to keep me company and pace me for the initial quarter of the race, 13 miles from Pietermaritzburg to Camperdown," she says.

While I'm still stuck on the 13 miles, she explains that I only need to run the first leg. Then her other pacer takes over and I can drop out and catch a ride to the finish line in Durban. We'll have a drink together with the team at one of the beachfront hotels on the Indian Ocean and celebrate after the race.

A beer and lolling about on the beaches at Durban, how can I resist.

Despite my lectures and the distractions of a rigorous running routine, buoyed by an end to the rainy season, I'm unable to shake my depression and feelings of responsibility. The nightmare of mom's last call returns. Fragments of memories of the family farm and my favorite storytelling Uncle are emerging day and night. I recall visiting the Montlake Cut to see the skull races; but I'm puzzled about why I have repressed the details of these childhood memories. I soon learn that I can't force them. I need to discuss this with Claire.

This morning, I awake to a nagging sense that I have forgotten to do something. I ignore the feeling and continue to prep for my lecture. I'm giving my last lecture to my WITS graduate class for the Spring semester. The title is "Mentoring: Formal vs. Informal."

After my presentation, the students head for their next classes. Trekking across St. David's Street in Parktown, I follow the aroma of bread baking in the huge brick ovens at Mike's Kitchen. My favorite table is outside beneath a pergola overgrown with vines and under the fragrant sweet

purple lavender blooms of rows of Jacaranda trees. I bask in the lavender's essence and the aroma of bread baking, sipping on a Carling lager. To eat was my goal for coming here, but I'm satiated and order a three-bean salad. My heavenly bliss conflicts with a nagging feeling that I have forgotten something important.

When I return to my office, it's past noon. My secretary has left a fluorescent green post-it stuck on the wall. She posted it behind my desk, next to a female lioness poster downing a frantic gazelle in Kruger National Park. The symbolism suggests urgency.

April 14: Professor Claire arriving on South Africa Air flight #735 at 12:45 noon local time, 9:45 Greenwich time, Johannesburg International Airport in Kempton Park.

The nagging was for real, I had forgotten something. Claire wasn't teasing, she's arriving in 40 minutes. The nagging feeling goes away.

It's 12:05 and it takes 40 minutes to get to Kempton Park in lunch hour traffic. I shower and change into my favorite white linen slacks and shirt and rush out to the parking lot, shouting for my driver. Major is in the driveway next to the cottage polishing his old Benz. He's been my reliable driver since I decided I do not wish to die driving at 140 kph on the highways on the wrong side.

"We need to meet a flight at Kempton Airport at 12:45, can we make it?"

"No problem, Sahib," Major says.

He used to call me boss. I prefer Sahib.

Rolling to the taxiway from the runway, scattering several leaping Grant's gazelles, is a white, red, and blue South African Air Boeing 747 with its distinct gold tail. The animals move with righteous indignation across the runway as the tires screech, and puffs of smoke rise on touchdown. The big jet taxis for ten minutes, as if it's reluctant to end its graceful flight before rolling to a stop at the terminal.

The door behind the pilot's cabin swings open and a flight attendant pokes her head out. She gazes left, then right, and disappears back into the aircraft. Then she locks the opened door in place. A ramp rolls up, with a set of debarking stairs. A graceful form glides down the ramp from the jet. She tucks her long reddish-brown locks under her sunbonnet and ties it down with a white scarf flowing in the breeze.

This elegant Ingrid Bergman look-alike is experienced at theatrical entrances. I half expect to see an entourage descending the stairs behind her, a Hollywood movie crew arriving to do a Bogart and Bergman remake of *Casablanca*.

She squints in the bright sunlight, adjusts a pair of sunglasses as she descends royally. The sun reflects off the huge, mirrored lenses. She pauses midway down the stairs to lower the shades halfway down her nose. Peering over the rims, she searches for someone in the crowd that lines the fence near the terminal entrance.

"Hi Daniel Jonson!" she calls out with a queenly wave, "You beautiful man!"

"Hello to you too gorgeous," I call back, "that's our ride."

I point at the well-polished vintage black Benz, with a VIP flag flying from the radio antennae.

"Meet you at baggage claim," I say, "ask for Major, he'll help you with customs and your luggage."

My mistake I'm thinking, I told Major to put the VIP flag up, and that was what drew the crowd, that, and the dramatic entrance. Did I mention that Claire always travels first class?

After she clears customs, she repeats her condolences over my mom's recent demise, and gives me a hug that lasts for several minutes. To my way of thinking, she's irresistible. I admit to Claire that I lust after her, and she smiles back at me; then, when she is ready, she ravishes me. It works for me.

Major holds the passenger door open with a tip of his hat to Claire, and we slide into the backseat of the Benz. There are paparazzi gathering, enticed by Claire's flamboyant entrance. The VIP flag gets us through the traffic and guardhouse at the exit without a hitch.

Major drops Claire and I off in the Auckland Park District at the Bistro Coffee House.

"We'll walk home from here, Major," I say. "Thanks for the lift."

"I thought a lift is an elevator over here," Claire says.

"Is a boot a glove box or the trunk?"

"And is a 'Benz' a Mercedes or a 'Merc' a Ford Mercury?" she says.

"When I hired Major as my driver, I owned a 10-year-old Nissan that needed some repairs. I couldn't find an auto body shop listing in the yellow pages to repair the dents. Major recommended that I take the car to the panel beaters on Fourth Street by the SA Bank."

"What's a panel beater?"

"That's what I said," I say. "It's a shop where you get the dents knocked out of your car and then get it repainted."

"Very intuitive!" she says with a laugh. "What would I find in Seattle if I checked the yellow pages for a panel beater?"

Hugging and laughing, we enter The Bistro and order French press coffee for two. For the next several minutes, I stare into her hypnotic steely eyes, and she looks back into my blue-grey orbs, smiling all the while.

"Miss me?" she murmurs, laughing with a most appealing girlish laugh.

"Uh, huh!" I say, "And I love your do."

Learning to compliment her changes in hairstyle is a major element in our continuing relationship.

After catching up on her latest research, we chat about some local stuff, and the forthcoming Comrades double marathon that Dawselle plans to run next month.

"I can't wait to meet Dawselle," Claire says, "she sounds like someone I need to know so's I can catch up on what you've been up to."

"We're running several miles through the park and past the zoo tomorrow at 6 am rain or shine, care to join us?" I say.

"After a night's rest."

As we sip our French press coffees, I introduce Claire to the waitress who brings us a bag of bagels and cream cheese to go.

"This terrific young lady who is serving us is Flo," I say. "She's the Co-owner of The Bistro, and she's a friend and regular running partner of Dawselle's and mine."

"Welcome to The Bistro, my brother Dirk and I own this establishment," Flo says, "the coffee and bagels are on us."

"It's so nice to see a couple who enjoy each other's company," Flo says, adding, "Besides, you solved an enigma for Dirk and me about Professor Doctor Jonson."

We walk in silence, arm in arm, back to my two-bedroom white rental cottage.

"What did Flo mean about my solving an enigma about you?" Claire asks.

"She's just happy that I have such a beautiful lady as you in my life,"

"That's nice!" she says as I hug her and kiss her full on the mouth.

"Did I know you were coming to Joburg?" I say with a grin.

Claire's luggage blocks the front door to the cottage. Major had left them in the foyer in case it rained. I go behind the cottage and enter through the kitchen; then, I haul all seven bags inside. Each one must weigh over the limit at the airport. While Claire unpacks, which seems to take hours, I run around the house cleaning up a bit. After cleaning the dishes, I brew a pot of hojicha tea. I carry it with a plate of oven warmed sliced bagels and a bowl of cream cheese covered in wax paper to keep the flies away. We can enjoy the sunset from the porch swing. As I set the scene, I'm thinking to myself, I too have a flair for theatrics. No, make that the romantic. Claire floats out onto the porch, backlit by the kitchen light.

"Have you got any extra hangers?"

Her long reddish-brown hair hangs down over her shoulders, glistening from her shower. She's wearing an alluring sheer beige nightdress that distracts me and has me gawking.

She laughs, having attained the desired effect.

"The hangers can wait," she says.

Sitting on the back-porch swing, we watch in silence as a masterpiece gets drawn in front of us by mother nature.

Claire smiles and curls up next to me.

"You have missed me, haven't you?"

An unbelievable cast of planets and twinkling lights decorates the night sky along with several shooting stars streaking by. We miss most of the show.

After an hour of delighting each other, we do a second hour of cuddling. Claire gets out of bed, a lithe leopard stretching in a manner that has me enthralled.

A hearty, deep-throated laugh trails behind her as she retrieves an envelope from her spacious handbag and hands it to me.

"Later big boy!" she says. "Let's attend to business, if you're up to it?"

"I'm hoping that this news article will trigger more of your childhood memories of your storytelling uncle."

She hands me a copy of a Seattle-Times newspaper with a feature on the 50th anniversary of Pearl Harbor. The article also reprints a presidential apology letter to the Japanese American survivors and families of the internment camps. A part of Claire's latest research into lost and separated family members resulting from President Roosevelt's EO9066 in 1946.

"Sara Swenson, your mom's lawyer, called me and asked for your address in Africa," Claire says.

Sara apologizes for failing to reach you in person and sends her condolences. She sets forth the tentative schedule for the sale of the Jonson farm at auction this Autumn. Scribbled on the top of the page is a note: Jer and Daniel: Please notify me soon of a specific auction date best for you; the first to respond sets the date.

Details of family gatherings from back in 1940 and 1941, creep into my consciousness.

The first to arrive is a mental image of the farm, the geographic hub for the Jonson and Nordling clans.

I take a sip of hojicha tea and pick up the Seattle-Times. A column on page eight catches my eye. It's an editorial advocating building a second bridge across the Montlake Cut in Seattle. The plan is to accommodate foot and bicycle traffic and reduce crowding and congestion at Opening Day ceremonies.

At the bottom of the editorial, there's a plug for Opening Day of Seattle's Boating Spectacle for 1992. There is a photograph of the Montlake Cut Bridge. In the first week of May each year, the Bridge is the site of Opening Day. It marks the start of the boating season and festivities on the lakes and tributaries of the Puget Sound that surround Seattle.

"We visited the Montlake Cut on Opening Day with Uncle Paul in 1940."

"Tell me more."

"We arrived here to honor Uncle Paul's making the prestigious UW Huskies freshman rowing team and see his first race," I say, "it was a special day with a picnic."

"That's significant detail," she says, "we need detail in each childhood memory that comes to you."

Then Claire lays an unexpected bomb on me.

"I'm sorry, I almost forgot," she says as she digs around in her handbag, which I swear contains enough stuff to equip an army platoon.

"Sara Swenson sent another envelope with me," she says, "one I'm to give to you if I see you before Jer."

I open the envelope. It contains a note from Uncle Paul addressed to Connie back in 1940. It has a page of directions on how to get from Seattle's King Street train station to Montlake Cut Bridge.

"Go figure!" Claire says. "Put those directions together with the Opening Day news article, and I bet you can guess where we'll be on May 4."

"Seattle for the Opening Day festivities at the Montlake Cut Bridge," I say. "That's only a week from now."

"Eerie isn't it," she says. "Do you sense some force is leading you back to Seattle?"

"Could be family ghosts."

Uncle Paul's letter with directions for Connie to get to the bridge sparks my optimism. The log jam unravels in my memory attic, but it's only the start of what Claire is planning for me.

"I have a therapeutic plan for you to consider. How to deal with all the cobwebs and break up at least some log jams and confusion in your memory-attic," Claire says. "Want to hear it?"

"Are you suggesting that my memory-attic is log jam and needs organizing?"

"Your words, not mine," Claire says, "My early prognosis is that you are suffering from repressed memories caused by a traumatic event during your childhood."

Uncle Paul's map and directions lead us to the bridge, where the Opening Day celebration starts on May 4, 1992.

"We will reenact your family celebration and picnic trip of 1940 with a visit to the Montlake Bridge," Claire says. "Sounds exciting."

"Let me guess," I say, "the next step is to make a list of the key places and events that link to my childhood and Uncle Paul."

"You grasp things quickly for someone with only one PhD," Claire says with a wry smile. "We'll start with events, people, and places which already are invading your consciousness."

"A picnic, Uncle Paul's return from the War, and family gatherings for Christmas at the Jonson farm in Spokane in 1940 and 1941 before the raids on Pearl Harbor," I say. "Those are high on the list. I believe we have a plan."

"I'll start a file in my notepad, you do the same."

"Okay, if I get some rest first?"

"You can try, but you're so wound up, it's not likely."

She's betting that I won't be able to sleep with all the logs rushing down the sluice and into the open water. She's right. More logs slide down the sluice and reveal details in my dreams, and I get no sleep.

After Opening Day, it's on to log step two, then step three, and so forth, careful so's I don't slip off the rolling logs. Her plan calls for slight steps until we turn over the log that uncovers the event and reason behind my trauma, repressed memories, and feelings of guilt.

We discuss why I'm stressing over mom's passing. Why is it coupled with the demise of my uncle?

"No wonder nothing else seems to matter," Claire says. "All you say makes sense, but I suspect there is something else that is bothering you. An event hidden deep in the childhood years of the log jam in your memory-attic."

"It's coming back a log at a time," I say, "but it may turn into a flood of logs at some point?"

"That's why I'm here," Claire says with a warm smile.

After a morning run over hot oatmeal, topped with slices of golden delicious apples and brown sugar, we discuss the news that is the context for my childhood.

The attacks on Pearl Harbor were all the motivation Uncle Paul needed to enlist in the Navy. Three months later, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order #9066, evacuating, and incarcerating thousands of Japanese Americans from the Pacific coast. My extended family was soon scattered all over the globe.

"Is it possible to recover enough fragments of one's old memories to uncover a single secret lost fifty years ago?"

"Slow down," Claire says, "what's this 50-year-old secret about?"

"That's my dilemma," I say, "I don't remember. I'm not sure if I ever knew the secret reason behind my Uncle Paul's last story."

"What story is that?"

"Uncle Paul made up a scary story about a Chinaman," I say. "He made me promise to spread the tale all over the neighborhood while he was away."

"You were his apprentice storyteller?"

"I reveled in the role of his apprentice, but I've repressed most of my memories of Uncle Paul," I say. "His story about a Chinaman is starting to come back to me and I think I kept my promise."

I attempt to recall our extended family members at Big Black Rock when Uncle Paul first told his scary tale and secured my promise to spread it to the children in the neighborhood while he is away.

Claire sees my distress and says, "Don't force it, Daniel."

"With mom gone," I say, "Jer's the only family member left who heard Uncle Paul's stories."

"You can't force these memories," Claire says, "your pain keeps them buried deep in the agony of losing Uncle Paul and other extended family members to the war."

She's right, and their loss is painful to recall.

"We'll open the sluice more when we get to Opening Day," she says. "You can ask Jer what he remembers about your uncle's storytelling when you meet at the farm to inter Connie's ashes."

"Meanwhile, do you recall who else was there?" Claire asks.

"That's the problem," I say. "I can't remember individual names. But I'm certain some of them were with mom, Jer, and I at the Montlake Cut."

"Details," Claire says, "that's what we're looking for, and you're already breaking through the barrier."

"After he secured my solemn declaration to retell the story, he made me swear to a second promise," I say, "But, for the life of me, I can't recall what it was."

"Let me get this straight," Claire says. "What we are looking for is a forgotten commitment to your favorite storytelling uncle. Hidden amongst the cobwebs of your memory-attic. And your uncle had a secret reason for devising a story and making you promise to spread it throughout the neighborhood. Then he wanted you to do something else?"

"That's the gist of it."

"How simple can it get," Claire says. "I get the scary part of his story, he wanted to ward off trespassers while he's away, makes sense, but why are you full of feelings of guilt?"

"I sense that you are grappling with something," Claire says, "but you're not making it clear my love."

"You suggested that some traumatic event occurred in my childhood, and it is blocking or repressing my memories."

"Can Jer verify whether you kept your pledge to Uncle Paul?" she says, "Do you want to call him or wait until the two of you are at the farm?"

It becomes noticeable that exhaustion is setting in for both of us. I suggest that we take a fresh look at the issue in the morning.

"There's a secret hidden somewhere deep in your memory-attic, but why guilt?" Claire says as she falls asleep before finishing her thought.

In seconds she's sawing wood. I don't dare wake her, and I'll never tell her she snores like a lumberjack.