A pebble in the pond

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I have no recollection of my older sister Deborah. She was shot and killed at her school when I was a small child. One boy had intended to kill another boy and opened fire in a crowd. He succeeded in hitting his intended victim, but the human body does not always stop the trajectory of bullets. The bullet passed through the boy's body and continued on to strike and kill my sister, an innocent passerby.

These events occurred in Denver, Colorado, nearly 30 years ago. As I grew up, my parents seldom spoke of Debbie. On those rare occasions when her name was mentioned, I remember that their bodies and faces seemed to sag as though something inside them had given way, as if their everyday mien had been punctured and all the air let out. Their vision turned inward, no longer seeing the room around them, instead seeing Debbie as she talked, laughed, played. Seeing her as she had looked when she left for school every unremarkable morning and when she had come home every unremarkable afternoon.

My mother has told me several times of a favorite memory of Debbie. She speaks in gentle, even tones as she tells of how much my sister loved little children. Debbie had wanted to be a schoolteacher when she grew up, and spent hours with small groups of younger children who lived in the neighborhood, teaching them their abc's and one-two-three's. Sometimes a "pupil" or two of Debbie's would come to our door and ask for "the Little Mother," and my mother always smiles softly when she recounts the words.

Although I don't remember Debbie now, my mother has told me that I missed her when she died. That I was solemn for a while, and cried often. Nearly every day when Debbie had come home from school, she would walk with me a short distance along the pavement in front of
our home, me on my tricycle and she strolling beside. My mother has said to me that, for a long time after Debbie’s death, I would not ride my tricycle.

I have some idea of what my sister looked like because of the three-by-five photograph of her which was ever present throughout my childhood and adolescent years, and which is still prominently displayed in my parents’ living room. The photo, encased in a brass-colored frame, sits on a lacy white doily, as it has for as long as I can remember. It must have been a school photograph, posed before a portable screen. In it, Debbie is sitting with her hands clasped in her lap. Her pink dress and pink plastic-frame glasses stand out against the dull green backdrop. She has short, curly brown hair that appears to have been soft and springy. She is looking straight out from the photograph, a smiling, round-faced, slightly plump young woman whose relaxed pose and clear-eyed gaze speak of calm trust and an easy, open friendliness. This is the only likeness of Debbie I have ever seen.

However, I do know one other detail. It has to do with her hands. My mother says Debbie had pretty hands, and has explained by describing that while most people have a knob marking the location of each knuckle, Debbie had a small dimple.

That single photograph and my mother’s description of my sister’s hands are all I know of Debbie’s appearance. And until recently, I knew very little about her death save for a few essential facts—a small collection of bare, spare details about which I’d had many long-standing questions. Questions as basic as: How old was Debbie when she died? How old was I? Why was there a crowd and why was Debbie in that crowd? Why did the one boy want to kill the other boy? What
happened to the boy who was shot—did he live or did he die? What happened to the boy who did the shooting?

For most of my life, I harbored a mild interest in such questions, but as I passed the age of 30, it became more and more important to me to know the circumstances of my sister's death. I don't know why my curiosity suddenly waxed as I entered my fourth decade of life. Probably it was because, as I matured, my understanding of death and loss also matured. However, one thing I do know is that my resultant exploration of the details of her death quickly became an exploration of certain facets of myself. Her death was an important part of my past, after all. And, for each of us, our past—even the parts unremembered—shapes who we are in the present and forecasts who we may be in the future. The past doesn't determine who we are and who we will be, but it has an undeniably strong influence. Debbie's life and Debbie's death had an influence on me, even though I do not have a single recollection of her. Being a number of years younger than each of my siblings, I am the only member of my family who does not have memories of Debbie. Her death had a profound effect within my family, and it didn't seem right to allow myself to remain in ignorance about it.

I could not ask my parents or my two brothers about Debbie as I didn't wish to expose the carefully scabbed-over wounds of their pain. And so I began to look for impersonal answers to my questions. Answers that could be obtained calmly, antiseptically.

One of my first steps was to discover the date of Debbie's death. I didn't even know the year, except that it was during the late '50s or early '60s. I decided to contact the cemetery where she was buried. Searching my memory, all I could recall of the name of the cemetery
was that it began with the word *Fort*. In the Yellow Pages of a Denver telephone book I had located in a library, I found the name I wanted--Fort Logan National Cemetery--and I copied the number on a bit of scrap paper.

Later, seated at a telephone, I took a deep breath and called that number, pressing the little square buttons on the telephone's front panel with deliberate care. The man who answered put me on hold as he went to look up the information I requested. When he returned, he told me both the date of death and the date of interment.

I thanked the cemetery attendant and hung up the phone. Then I cried. I think it was the first time I truly felt pain for my parents' loss. The first time I felt real empathy for their agony. Prior to that phone call, Debbie's death had, for the most part, been just a plain fact to me, an entry in the family history that held some curiosity but little other emotional value. Since I didn't remember her, I'd felt no pain when thoughts of my sister had crossed my mind or when I had looked at her photograph. That photograph of Debbie might as well have been a tintype of a relative who had lived and died a hundred years before my birth for all the feeling of personal loss it had engendered in me. I was sorry for my parents' suffering, but I had shared that suffering only at a great emotional distance. However, the particular date on which Debbie had died held a horror that thrust the suffering into my face.

She was killed on October 17, 1961, and the funeral was on October 20. My sister was buried five days before my third birthday.

I wondered if my parents had celebrated my third birthday, offering brightly wrapped gifts and cake with candles. Whenever I have seen my mother make a cake, and I have seen her make many,
she has always carefully applied the frosting in little swirls. Using a butter knife for this task, one expert twist of the wrist after another turned the frosting into a mass of lively curlicues, like the choppy waters of a lake during a spring storm. I wondered if my mother had been able to make a cake for my birthday in 1961, put swirls in the frosting, and place three candles on top. I wondered, if she had managed to do these things, what they had taken out of her. I wondered if my family had been able to sing "Happy Birthday" to me, if they had clapped and smiled when I blew out the candles and made a wish, and, if so, how they had managed it.

It's possible, perhaps even likely, that my birthday celebration was postponed for a while, until my family felt they could deal with it. It may have even been cancelled for that year. And what of every birthday after that? The anniversary of Debbie's death and the anniversary of my birth are only a few days apart, year after year. Surely, every October since 1961, my parents thought about Debbie's death around the same time they began to make preparations for my birthday. But they never showed it. I never knew they might be mourning at the same time they were celebrating.

Knowing the date of Debbie's death allowed me to turn to back issues of The Denver Post for the rest of the story. On the screen of a microfilm reader was where I began to find the answers to many of my remaining questions. The pages flashed by in a dizzying grey blur as I turned the crank until I came to October 17, 1961. The Post was apparently printed in the late afternoon or early evening because there on the front page was the headline "Girl Slain, Boy Shot at Morey School."
The Post provided information in the impersonal language I had sought. Articles appearing on October 17 and 18 told a complicated story featuring a variety of characters swirling about in a maelstrom of anger.

The shooting occurred at Morey Junior High School, located at East 14th Avenue and Clarkson Street. The name of the boy who had killed my sister was Tennyson Star Beard. It was a name of great importance to my past while being a name I had never known before. I was briefly mesmerized by its unusual sound and form. It was the name of a boy I had never met yet who had caused my life to change in fundamental ways, and I paused to let this name take its place in my mind.

Bad feelings had arisen between Beard and two other boys, Michael Smith and William Hachmeister. Beard was quoted as saying that Smith and Hachmeister "had been talking about" him. Beard and Smith both liked the same girl, whose name was not revealed in the Post. Beard stated that he walked this girl to school on the morning of October 17, and was later told that Smith had been referring to him by "certain bad names." In retaliation, during the second class period of the day, Beard entered Smith's classroom and slapped him. Sometime during the third period, Hachmeister, who was Smith's friend, challenged Beard to fight. Beard accepted, but stated that he wouldn't fight during school hours. Shortly thereafter, Beard was suspended for having struck Smith.

At the time Beard was suspended, an altercation occurred between Beard and the assistant principal, William Rapp. The exact nature of this altercation was a matter of some disagreement. Beard claimed that Rapp slapped him across the face, and, further, had done so
with enough force to knock Beard against a locker. Rapp denied this, stating instead that he had "grabbed" Beard "with a half-slap and a half-grab on the side of the neck--actually behind the head." Rapp added that he "did this only after he [Beard] made a couple of smart remarks and had refused to follow orders." In any case, following this incident, Beard left school and went home.

At his home, 2140 Humboldt Street, Beard took his stepfather's .38-caliber revolver from a closet, then returned to school. The revolver was concealed under a coat he'd draped over his arm. His intention, he later stated, was "to get Mr. Rapp--shoot him in the chest." Beard claimed that he didn't "mind being whipped by a teacher," but that he "don't like anybody slapping me." On his way to "get" Mr. Rapp, Beard encountered Michael Smith in the lunchroom. Smith was sweeping the floor there, in preparation for the lunch period, which was imminent. Beard wanted Smith to go outside with him. He pressed the barrel of the gun against Smith's back and commanded Smith to precede him out into the hall. Smith did not comply.

Beard then went quickly into the hallway outside the lunchroom. There he saw William Hachmeister. Hachmeister's mother was there as well. She had accompanied her son to school that day because he and Smith had skipped school the previous day, and she wanted to see that he didn't do it again. Beard spoke caustically to Hachmeister. Hachmeister presented his fists, ready to fight, and approached Beard. At least one witness saw the gun barrel protruding from beneath the coat Beard had over his arm. Beard fired one or two shots, hitting Hachmeister once in the chest.
It happened a few minutes after noon. Many students were in the hallway, on their way to lunch. Debbie was one of those students. The bullet punched through Hachmeister's body and struck Debbie in the head. Beard then ran away. Not long after the shooting, Debbie died in the emergency room of Denver General Hospital. Hachmeister was critically wounded.

Tennyson Star Beard, 14, was arrested a few blocks from the school by Patrolman Steve Snyder at approximately 12:20 p.m. He still had the gun and admitted to having fired it. During later questioning, when officers asked why he had shot Hachmeister, Beard replied, "Because I wanted to." The following day, Beard told a Post reporter that, being at the school anyway, he'd decided he "might as well do a good job of it."

Accompanying the October 17 headline was a photo of Beard: a slender boy in a striped shirt, sitting in a wooden chair. His arms are behind his back, perhaps handcuffed. His shoulders and head sag forward a bit, and his face is tilted a little to the left. With a heavy expression, he is looking downward and slightly off to one side. What I noticed most, however, about this photograph was not Beard's demeanor or his expression. It was his color.

Tennyson Star Beard was black. This was quite a surprise. I had always envisioned Debbie's killer as being white, and it had never even occurred to me that he might have been anything other than white. I guess I'd just always assumed that if he'd been a nonwhite then that fact would have been included among the sketchy details my parents had told me about Debbie's death. But my parents, to their credit, had never made an issue of the skin color of the boy who had shot Debbie.
To my recollection, Beard’s race had never once been mentioned in my presence. However, as I thought about the matter, I began to understand something which had puzzled me for several years. Something about myself.

I am a racist. What an inelegant thing to admit. But since I wish to explore the truth, let me be truthful. I am against apartheid. I enthusiastically hate the KKK. I do not believe in separate water fountains, restrooms, cafés, or schools. I do not believe in relegating blacks to the back of the bus. I sit next to black people on buses. I am courteous to black clerks in stores. I am polite to blacks on the street, in restaurants, at movie theaters, and in grocery stores. I am more polite to blacks than I am to whites. I am racist.

I believe that all people should have the same fair chance in life. I believe that all races should have equal access to education, jobs, decent housing. I believe that all colors and all cultures are deserving of respect. And so on, and so on. The problem is that, in the abstract, I consider blacks to be just people the same as any other people, while in the concrete, blacks make me uncomfortable. I’ve been aware of this dichotomy for some time, I just didn’t know where it had come from, how it had formed, and why it had formed. Now, in examining my thoughts on race, I see more clearly the particular fibers that have been woven together to form confused patterns of black and white.

I have had several black acquaintances and a few black friends. The name of one of those friends was James. At 6’7” and 230 pounds, James could appear threatening to those who didn’t know him. In reality, he was gentle, shy, kind, and caring. Though he had been raised in Birmingham, Alabama, Southern racism had not left him bitter. His
best friend was a wiry white man named Márk, who was nearly a foot shorter than James. Though I have long since lost contact with both of them, I consider James and Mark to have been among my closest friends in early adulthood.

James had a pithy wisdom, of which I have a pet memory. Near the frayed and frosted end of late winter 1980, with the threat of snow still snapping in the breeze, I had just started a new job. I needed to be at work at 6:30 in the mornings, and, having no car, I had to walk. I made this predawn journey four days a week, peering through the dark, my breath visible as ghostly, evanescent puffs in front of my face.

The only practical route took me past the town cemetery. There were many large trees among the graves, spreading their branches above the headstones. Being winter, the trees were bare of leaves, and, in the moonlight, they thrust their twisted, bony shadows across the pale rock faces of the monuments. These shadows then slithered along the silver-grey grass to join with the shadows of other branches, the shadows of shrubs and bushes, and the shadows of the headstones themselves, forming little pools of impenetrable darkness spilling liberally across the grounds.

To avoid the cemetery would have taken me far out of my way and would have added maybe an extra 15 minutes to my trip. So I kept to my route past the cemetery, my shoes crunching loudly on the road surface. The sound of my footsteps seemed to echo against the night and the shadows, and my eyes continually scanned the graveyard as I walked past. Perhaps I'd seen too many horror movies and read too many ghost stories, for, every morning on my way to work, I felt like Ichabod Crane awaiting the approach of the headless horseman.
One day, I confided my uneasiness to James. He had a warm, simple, and direct response that I’ve treasured ever since:

"You've got nothing to fear from dead folks. It's the live ones you've gotta be afraid of."

I was as comfortable around James as I was around my white friends. His race, while I was aware of it, was of minor importance to me. He was my friend—tall, strong, and soft-spoken. His color was just one attribute of his physical appearance, one attribute among many.

However, the relaxed relationship I had with James was the exception rather than the rule. For most of the other black people with whom I have ever come into contact, their blackness was a strong presence for me. Their color was often, for me, the most important thing about them. Their most significant characteristic, permeating every other thought or feeling I had about them. Why was this? I was not raised in a redneck household. Racism was not something I had been taught. Or was it, just a little?

When I was growing up, my family laughed heartily at the bigotry of Archie Bunker. In our home, the word "nigger" was an epithet which brought punishment as surely as "damn," "hell," "bastard," or "son of a bitch." Sidney Poitier was one of our favorite actors, and together we watched *Lilies of the Field*, *A Patch of Blue*, and *To Sir, With Love* on the small grey screen of our television. I remember my father rooting for Poitier's character in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, saying that this black man should marry the white woman he loved regardless of whether or not her parents proffered their blessing.

The official policy in our home was that race was of no importance in determining a person's worth or worthiness, morality or integrity,
capacity for violence or capacity for love. There were whites who were
good and whites who were not, there were blacks who were good and
blacks who were not. My parents made an effort to teach me that race
was not a marking factor.

Yet there were murky undercurrents that swirled tendrils of
turbidity through this clear lesson. Once, when I was 19 and no longer
living with my parents, I went on a date with a black man. A short
while later, I mentioned this to my parents, and my father quickly
asked if the man had picked me up at my home.

"No," I replied. In fact, I had gone downtown to meet the man at a
shabby bar in a questionable neighborhood, but I didn't offer my father
this further news.

"Good," my father said. "You don't want to ruin your reputation."

My single date with the young man in question, as is often the
case with casual dates, was more than adequate to determine that he
and I were not sufficiently compatible to sustain a relationship;
however, I occasionally wonder what would have occurred if Joe and I
had really enjoyed one another's company. Somehow, judging from my
father's reaction to the one date, I doubt he would've appreciated the
replaying of the plot of Guess Who's Coming to Dinner within his own
family.

More telling still was a brief episode which had occurred several
years earlier, when I was perhaps in my early or middle teens. I was
watching television, lying on the floor in the living room with my head
propped up by a half-deflated football, as was my custom. My father
was seated at the kitchen table, reading the newspaper. I heard the
pages whisk and crackle as he turned them. Suddenly, he started to
shout about an article he'd just read, an article concerning an incident in which a man had beaten his baby to death. Banging his hand down on the table once or twice for emphasis, my father several times said, "I'll bet he was black! I'll bet he was a black man!" His voice was filled with disgust, and he spat the word black as if it made a bitter taste in his mouth.

This was the only explosion of racial hatred I have ever heard from either of my parents, but there were other, more subtle, indications of their racial distrust. When I was a child, my mother told me of the tensions between the blacks and the whites in the Newark, New Jersey, neighborhood in which she had been raised. She told me of a time when, as a child herself, she got into a fight with two black girls. My mother explained that the black girls had started the scuffle, that they had been hostile toward her solely because she was white. The implied message was: Be wary.

And so I received contrasting signals from my parents. While the message "Be tolerant" was clearly spoken from the lectern, the message "Be wary" was semaphored from the sidelines. While it was stated that all people deserved a fair chance regardless of race, it was unstated that this fair chance was to be freely offered to white people, but blacks had to earn it.

Surely my parents were highly aware of the color of Tennyson Star Beard. However, they tried to keep their racial anger locked away from me, struggling with it in silence, trying to protect me from acquiring bigotry. To the greater extent, I think they succeeded. Being corrosive, though, some of their anger oozed and spurted out, staining their endeavors to teach me tolerance.
October 17, 1961. The comic strips on the funnies page in The Denver Post included "Gasoline Alley," "Barney Google," "Gordo," "Scamp," "Mary Worth," "Dick Tracy," "Orphan Annie," and "Brenda Starr." It was the day before the Denver opening of Paramount's Breakfast at Tiffany's. The movie advertisement in the Post declared:

She's funny . . . she's sad . . . she's extraordinary . . .

she's glittering . . . she's
AUDREY
HEPBURN

as that delightful darling
HOLLY GOLIGHTLY . . . serving champagne
kisses and wonderful fun in

BREAKFAST
AT TIFFANY'S

"The gayest comedy Hollywood has served up in years," the ad quoted Life magazine as reporting. Delayed by a dinner engagement, JFK and Jackie were 45 minutes tardy in arriving at Constitution Hall for the National Symphony Orchestra's opening performance of the season. Mrs. Kennedy wore white gloves, gold shoes, and a blue and gold theater suit, while President Kennedy was in a tuxedo and bow tie.

October 17, 1961. The Soviets announced they were planning to explode on October 31 the biggest nuclear bomb ever made by man. The previous big-bomb record was held by the United States: a 15-megaton hydrogen device which had been exploded in 1954. In contrast, the Soviets' new bomb was a 50-megaton monster, meaning that it would have a blast equivalent to 50 million tons of TNT. The force would be 2,500 times greater than that of the atom bomb the U.S. dropped on Hiroshima in WWII. The American people were outraged.
It was another reason to decry the Red Menace. Yet it was hard to tell what the Americans were outraged most about—the Soviets' big bomb itself, or the fact they had been one-upped.

October 17, 1961. Ground beef was on sale at Safeway for two pounds for 69¢. Louisiana was trying to ward off desegregation. "Does Bladder Irritation Make You Nervous?" inquired an advertisement in the Post. Artichokes at King Soopers cost two for 29¢. Three major railroads were voluntarily planning to desegregate their facilities in the South.

The most prominent feature of a Mountain States Bank advertisement in the Post was a large, stylized drawing of a pair of handguns.

"loaded!" proclaimed the ad.

\textit{loaded is the word}

for our roster of services--more than two dozen in all, and designed to serve your every financial need, promptly, thoroughly, conveniently! When you need financial assistance, remember--we're loaded with answers and action!

# # #

Denver, Colorado, on October 17, 1961. It is a Tuesday. The temperature just before noon is a pleasant and soothing 75°. The sunshine ripples in sheets through the yellow leaves of fall, brightening the leaves' color so that they nearly appear to glow from within, or seem like tiny plate-glass windows, dangling and moving in the air.

In the classrooms at Morey Junior High School, the students are thinking about lunch. They half-listen to their teachers expounding on geography or algebra or biology while watching the hands of the clock edge tentatively closer to noon.
In the lunchroom, a lone boy is sweeping the floor. The broom makes soft whoosh, whoosh sounds as he draws it across the tiles in strokes. In the background, the gravy-spattered, sweaty cooks are clattering the kitchen utensils as they set the food in place to be served. The smell of beef-and-vegetable stew is strong in the room, and steam is rising from tubs of mashed potatoes. Trays of hot biscuits are set on the counter, pats of butter are stacked on a ceramic platter. Fresh-sliced cucumbers are tossed in a large bowl by the gloved handful, and red Jello quivers as it is sliced into serving-size portions with a spatula.

An angry boy appears. Moving with coiled rage and nervous fear, he approaches the boy holding the broom. A coat is draped over his left arm, and he keeps both his hands concealed beneath the coat. The words hissing from his mouth, he orders the other boy to go outside with him. The boy refuses, and, clutching the broom handle in his fists as if its round, smooth solidness could ground the electricity of the moment, he turns again to his work.

Stepping quickly, his right hand slightly extended though still concealed by the coat, the angry boy pushes against the boy holding the broom. The boy with the broom straightens his spine sharply as he feels the gun barrel thrust against the small of his back. Commanded once more to go outside, he refuses once more.

Elsewhere in the building, students begin to fill the hallways. It is the beginning of the lunch period, and they are on their way to the lunchroom. They crowd noisily out of the classrooms in twos and threes, each carrying an armload of books. They chat loudly and easily among themselves, discussing classes, teachers, homework, parents, parties, boyfriends, girlfriends. The first few students arrive in the
lunchroom, and, heedless of the tension between the two boys, get in line for their food. Trays and silverware clap and clank and hands reach for small cartons of cold milk.

The angry boy hesitates, then, in frustration, turns and strides quickly from the lunchroom and into the hallway. Plunging against the swelling flow of students headed for the lunchroom door, his eyes suddenly focus and hold on the face of still another boy. This boy is tall and athletic, and a middle-aged woman is walking beside him. The two boys advance toward each other, shouting insults. The woman lifts her voice in alarm. The tall boy raises closed fists in front of his chest, ready to fight. The angry boy stops and backs up a few paces. Both the angry boy's hands are still under his coat. One of the other students gasps as he sees the end of a black cylindrical gun barrel protruding from beneath the folds of the coat, pointed at the boy with the clenched fists. The fisted boy keeps advancing until the two boys are only a few feet apart.

A sharp, loud noise explodes through the air in the hallway. The boy's fists unclench in surprise, and he groans and grasps at his chest as he falls down, a red spot spreading on his shirtfront. A girl behind him also falls, spilling her books across the hallway floor.

# # #

When I was a baby, my parents tried to make a living at farming. I think they were attracted by the notion of living on the land, the freedom of self-employment, and the forthright and tangible results of their toil. I think they expected to find a sort of internal glory by holding in their hands the vegetables they had grown and the buckets of milk they had tugged from their cows. They expected to discover,
along with the yolks, personal peace inside the eggs lifted from beneath their chickens and purity of strength in every bite of meat they raised themselves.

Instead, they found crushingly hard work that ground their romantic dreams to ragged bits. To undertake the labors of the day, they had to rise in the dark at 4:30 in the morning and seldom made it to bed before 11:30 at night. What didn't get done one day was added to the list for the next. Although their older children helped with the chores, my parents were drowning in work and worry. There were cows to milk, stalls to clean, eggs to gather, chickens to feed, fields to plow, hay to bale, fences to mend, bills to pay, clothes to buy, children to raise. The financial rewards reaped were not enough to support a family of six. And so my parents filed bankruptcy and my father went to work as a machinist.

For the next 20 years, until his retirement from disability, in a succession of machine shops in a succession of states, my father had to stand on hard-soled shoes throughout most of the workday, shuffling his feet from time to time to relieve the discomfort in his feet and legs. He stood before lathes and drill presses, using the machines to sculpt chunks of oily metal into precise shapes according to exacting specifications. With great care, he would shave shining metal curls from each of these works-in-progress, mindful that he would ruin the piece if he removed a few microns too many. For every order he was given to fill, he produced in this way the requisite number of objects, each of the precise shape and size required, every piece within an order as like to the others as possible. These small, smooth abstract sculptures were not destined for display in any art gallery or on marble pedestals in the
homes of proud smoking-jacket- or silk-dressing-gown-clad owners. Instead, these gleaming objects were the parts from which machinery was made. My father used machines to make parts for other machines. These parts included items like gears and pins and cylindrical shafts—the knuckles and kneecaps and rib bones of industrial equipment.

The job was boring, repetitive, painstaking, and unhealthy. Year after year, the noise from the machines pulsed against his eardrums, dulling his hearing. The solvents used to remove the lubricating oils and grease from the completed parts were sometimes stored in open barrels on the shop floor. The fumes made my father's lungs fill with mucus. And while these solvents efficiently removed the grease from the smooth metal surfaces, it seemed that no soap or solvent could remove the black, ground-in grime from my father's hands. The tiny ridges on his fingers and palms trapped inky grease and particles of dirt between them. Each fingernail was punctuated by a crescent of black underneath, which was out of reach of any cleaning solution or implement. In some of the shops where my father worked in Arizona, there was no air conditioning, and one of the few concessions to the brutal heat of the summer was that the building doors would be propped open. My father and the other men at their machines did their work regardless of the sweat pouring down their faces, standing in the gathering heat of the cavernous, warehouse-like oven wherein they labored, trying to make it through the day so they could go home to the cool of their families.

On October 18, 1961, in a speech to the Soviet Communist Party Congress, Premier Nikita Khrushchev stated his conviction that, within
the following two decades, the Soviet people would attain the highest standard of living on the planet. The Denver Police Department was roiling with scandal, with 42 current and former police officers having been charged with various crimes. The latest bit of infamy along these lines was the recent revelation that a local $22,000 burglary which had gone unsolved for some time was discovered to have been committed by police officers. In the Denver suburb of Littleton, the city building code was modified to permit the placement of fallout shelters in the basements of residents' homes.

On October 18, 1961, an article in the Post described a new rehabilitation program aimed at focusing female juvenile delinquents on more socially valued behavior. This program, sponsored by Denver's juvenile hall, had as its core a beauty/fashion show in which delinquent girls were the models. Six girls, all on probation, participated in the show, which was entitled "So What Makes a Girl Beautiful?" Three of these participants were so moved by the experience that, after the show, they declared their newly discovered ambitions to become professional models. Jean-Luc Godard's New Wave film, Breathless, starring Jean Seberg, completed its run at the Esquire. And an explosion in the chemical-mixing room at a Helene Curtis cosmetics plant in Chicago destroyed the building in which it occurred, injuring scores of people and shattering windows for 20 blocks.

On October 18, 1961, William Hachmeister was in critical condition after having spent a difficult night in Denver General Hospital. The Humphrey family also had experienced a difficult night, as did Beard's family. Tennyson Star Beard had spent the night in jail and the Humphreys had spent the night in mourning.
On October 18, 1961, an article about the Humphrey family and the Hachmeister family appeared in the Post. Mentioned in that article was our family mailbox on which were listed the names of my parents followed by the name of each child: David, Debbie, John, and Jenny.

The names on the mailbox struck me as an unexpected bit of homey whimsy. I have not known the Humphreys to be a tribe of whimsical people. Rather, I have known them as somber, cynical, and wary—not really the sort to list children's names on mailboxes. I have known my father, in particular, to be an angry, stern, and bitter man, short-tempered, overcritical, and suspicious. Although in his later years my father seems to have finally found some measure of peace or perhaps resignation, many of my childhood memories of him are peopled by a man whose personality was often grim, explosive, and uninviting.

I sometimes used to think he hated me. He prided himself that he rarely spanked his children, but he regularly lashed them with words instead. He would roar and rage when angered, and it seemed that the slightest thing could set him off. Countless occasions he criticized me to tears and frequently dismissed my opinions by asserting that my thoughts on nearly any given subject were "silly-stupid." While he acknowledged my intelligence, and was proud of my scholastic achievements, he would from time to time declare my ideas null and void by disdainfully remarking that insanity and genius often go together. While he honestly praised my grades in school, he often said that I was book smart but common-sense stupid. He fired his tearing scorn at me in nearly daily barrages, and he was a good aim. It sometimes seemed that any comment or action of mine, or lack of
comment or action of mine, could trigger his anger, the flaming words raining down on my head, leaving invisible burns wherever they landed. I was uncomfortable and guarded in his presence much of the time, never knowing when my step might brush a land mine or draw fire.

He used to constantly deride my appearance, saying that I had been cute when I was a tiny child but that my looks had changed as I grew older. He would say that my thick, difficult-to-control hair reminded him of mattress stuffing and that my legs were so disproportionately long my body appeared deformed. He was fond of remarking that I was so skinny I had to stand twice in the same place in order to cast a shadow, and both my parents, in frustration over a child's reluctance to eat, sometimes shouted at me during meals to eat my food, causing my stomach to lurch and knot and my throat to squeeze tight shut like a garden hose with a kink in it.

The length and style of my hair was a constant source of irritation for my parents. They wanted it short and curly while I wanted it long and straight, as was the fashion during my growing-up years. During an era of miniskirts and long expanses of exposed leg, I was required to wear full skirts to the knee, and lower. And when other girls my age were wearing tennis shoes or sandals, my parents once or twice purchased saddle shoes for me and forced me to use them. My parents bought those shoes because saddle shoes were sturdy, solid, and sensible footwear. It was of great importance to my parents to be sturdy, solid, and sensible, but their antifashion sensibility made it difficult for me to fit in, to be accepted by my peers. It kept me from
enjoying how I dressed and was an obstacle to feeling comfortable with how I looked.

I often wondered why so much bitterness and anger toward me flourished within my father and why I was forced to dress in clothing styles reminiscent of those that had been popular 10 years earlier. In retrospect, seeing the photo of Debbie in my mind, I tentatively wonder if perhaps my parents had been trying, consciously or unconsciously, to make me look like Debbie. And sometimes I wonder if my father's anger wasn't generated at least partially because he found me to be a poor imitation, both in looks and personality.

And yet . . . And yet . . . My father calls me Jenny, his pet name for me, because he loves the sound. I was named Jennifer because my father likes the name Jenny, finding it soft and sweet and gentle. Perhaps it conjures images in his mind of a little girl with glowing cheeks, picking bright flowers in the sunshine of a summer afternoon. But his quick and frequent temper and his fathomless bitterness caused black flowers of fear and rage to grow within me throughout my childhood and adolescence, and, when I was still quite young, I decided that I hated the name Jenny if only because my father loved it.

And there was my name in The Denver Post on October 18, 1961—listed as Jenny. That was years before I objected to the diminutive form of my name, when Jenny had sounded natural to me and was simply what I was called, and nothing more.

I now understand that much of my father's anger was due to the suffering which had been ground into him like the grime on his hands. During his working life, he used most of his energy to feed and clothe and house his family, and had little left over save for the muck at the
bottom. He always made sure we had what basic commodities we needed—food, shelter, clothing, health care, school supplies, and so on—yet no matter how hard he tried, he could never get monetarily ahead, could never feel that his family was financially secure. As a farmer, he'd fought with the land and the weather, working every hour of daylight and several of the dark. As a machinist, he'd stood hour after hour, year after year, on paining feet in dirty, noisy, steamy machine shops. He made it through each particular day only to pay the bills for that day. There was little extra to sweeten the tomorrows, and each day for him was as grim and sour and exhausting as the last. Yet he never walked away, as some men do. He stayed and struggled and looked upon his family as, I suspect, both his major burden and his only spring of comfort.

Then, in the middle of it all, to lose a child in such a sudden and jarring manner—a daughter shot in the head by a classmate in a junior-high-school hallway. The pain was slammed into his face and his heart and must have nearly smothered any hope and lightness and joy he still had. And so the bitterness settled in to stay, overflowing and indelible, murky and foul and rotting away at him.

I remember one time, several years after the shooting, my mother had unthinkingly placed inside a kitchen cupboard a jewelry box that had been Debbie's. This box was usually kept concealed in some hiding place, and my father, perhaps looking for a coffee mug, opened the cupboard and saw the small, ornamented chest there on the shelf. He flinched as if he had been struck, and turned and began to shout at my mother in rage for having put the thing where he could see it and be reminded of his loss. Then he sat roughly at the kitchen table and
began to cry. As he wept, he rubbed the dome of his head with the palms of his hands in a circular, agitated, anguished motion. This was the only time I have ever seen my father cry, and I have never seen anyone cry so hard. His pain howled up from his bowels. Great ropes of torment spilled out into the room, and I was transfixed with horror and fear and astonishment.

I now realize that a man who could mourn with such fury surely loved his children, including me. Most of the anger which he slapped out at me was the pent-up frustration of years of endless, ugly toil and hatred for the world, the fate, and even the God that had taken a child from him. For the most part, I was merely a convenient target, and my father's messy explosions of fermenting resentment generally had very little to do with me.

This understanding is ineffectual balm for the wounds my father caused me, but it has broadened my range of feelings toward him. Among the time-dulled blossoms of fear and rage are now also growing, green and new, vines of empathy, sympathy, and good will. Although many of my childhood memories of him will always taste vinegarish, I now see my father as a human being, wounded and lashing out, roaring with pain from a burnt and barren landscape, rather than as a vortex of pure anger for anger's sake.

# # #

On October 19, 1961, an article appeared in the Post in which it was claimed that the East German "Reds" were offering small rewards such as track suits to children who willingly reported to the authorities any persons planning to escape to West Germany. As part of the Mercury Project, 45 chimpanzees at Holloman Air Force Base in New
Mexico were being trained to perform simple, repetitive tasks during orbit. Near Chicago, a toddler and a baby were electrocuted in the bathtub when a radio slipped from the hands of their 5-year-old sister and fell into the water. A 28-year-old woman abandoned her baby boy at a hospital in Greensboro, South Carolina, a few hours after having given birth. Four men were charged with unnatural sex acts in Sterling, Colorado; it was suspected that these men were part of a "homosexual ring" which may have included as many as 40 other persons. Near Denver, a 16-year-old boy admitted to having killed a 6-year-old neighbor by stabbing him in the head with a nail. That evening, *Loss of Innocence*, a movie starring Susannah York, opened in Denver at the Esquire Theater.

On October 19, 1961, City Councilman Elvin Caldwell announced that a fund for the education of the remaining Humphrey children was being set up. Donations were to be sent to Dr. O. L. Lawson at the Radio Pharmacy.

On October 19, 1961, District Attorney Bert M. Keating was preparing to charge Tennyson Star Beard with first-degree murder. William Hachmeister's condition was beginning to improve. And it was revealed that the unnamed 14-year-old girl who was one corner of the quadrangle involving Beard, Smith, and Hachmeister had received a telephone call from Hachmeister on Monday, October 16, after Beard had walked her home from school. Hachmeister's purpose in calling this girl was to tell her to stop spending time with Beard, and she had informed Beard about this phone call the following morning—Tuesday, October 17.
On October 20, 1961, a train wreck northwest of Calcutta killed 20 people and injured 100. In California, the grieving widow of Clark Gable was raising their infant son alone—a son Gable had not lived to see. Yet another police officer, the 43rd, was incriminated in the Denver police scandals. Sonny Liston, who earlier in the year had been the number one contender for the heavyweight title, but who had been barred in July from boxing after pranksterish behavior landed him in trouble with police, was reinstated and allowed to resume his career. Sonja Henie and her husband, to facilitate the construction near Oslo of an art center and museum of modern art, donated $7 million in art and funds. And it was announced by those who decide such things that the bouffant hairdo was passé.

On October 20, 1961, District Attorney Keating filed a charge of first-degree murder against Tennyson Star Beard in Denver District Court and had compiled a list of 37 witnesses for the prosecution. A life sentence was the possible result for Beard if convicted on the charge. The death penalty would not be an issue since Beard was below the minimum age of 18 years. Keating asked that the defendant be held for trial without bail.

At 1:00 p.m. on October 20, 1961, Debbie's funeral took place at Howard's Park Avenue Chapel. Shortly thereafter, she was buried in Fort Logan National Cemetery. At my parents' request, because Debbie had wanted so much to be a teacher, her teachers served as her pallbearers.

I can recall only once having visited Debbie's grave, although I am sure I must have been taken there several times by my parents. I was
13 years old, and we were living in Phoenix, Arizona, where we had moved from Denver four years earlier. When my father took his annual one-week vacation, my parents and I set out for Denver by car. I believe we had done this every summer, or perhaps nearly every summer, since having moved to Phoenix, although, for some reason, I have clear memories of this trip alone.

I hated the desert around Phoenix, drab brown and grey and dusty green. I was derisive of those who rhapsodized about the beauty of the Arizona desert. I hated the arthritic-looking trees and bushes, all knobby and twisted, and I hated the thorns which grew on nearly every variety of plant, like needles and daggers always ready to prick and scratch and draw blood. I hated the heat and the savage sun that stopped water from pooling or flowing, burning off all moisture and leaving only the concrete-hard, rock-strewn earth. The cool, green mountains of Colorado, attired thickly with pine, draped with waterfalls and streams like shining necklaces--some of which ended in pools or lakes, like pendants--held a fascination for me as of a place strange and wondrous. Fogged and rainy or clear as cut diamonds, the Rocky Mountain region was, to me, the epitome of nature's beauty. I always looked forward to these trips for this reason, and assumed that my parents also eagerly anticipated the splendor of Colorado. I've since come to realize, however, that they must have been only half aware of the beauty around them, focused instead on a rectangular patch of grass in a Denver cemetery. My parents didn't go to Colorado every year for the scenery. They went to visit Debbie's grave.

I remember the deep, shadowed canyons we drove through that particular summer when I was 13, each containing a river rushing
beside the road, river and road together threading their way between the rock walls. I remember looking up at the tops of the mountains through the car window, tipping my head far back like a long-necked bird, ignoring the ache in my neck that came with the effort. Some of the highest peaks shone with snow, a brighter white than the cotton-fluff clouds floating against the blue backdrop above. I remember smiling, as he passed us on the road, at a dark-haired man driving a VW Bug, the same kind of car we had. And I remember he smiled back and that this simple communication with a stranger had both surprised and delighted me.

On the afternoon of the second day of driving, we arrived at the cemetery—an expanse of green, rolling hills punctuated here and there by tall trees with broad, rounded leaf-spreads, like dense green clouds tethered to earth. It was a sunny day, the sky glowed a rich blue, and the rows of headstones glittered white. Entering the gate, we drove partway up a hill on a narrow blacktopped road, past undulating acres of headstones set in rows. We got out of the car and began walking away from the road, across the carefully manicured grass. My parents were counting the rows, to find the grave they sought. A certain number of rows in this direction, then a certain number in another direction. We passed grave after grave, counting. Bouquets of flowers—some plastic, some real—had been laid near some of the headstones, and the colors were bright in the afternoon sun.

At last we came to Debbie's grave. It was marked by a white, rectangular, simple monument with a rounded top, just like many of the other graves. My parents stood quietly and looked at the flat face of the stone for a few minutes, then turned and headed back to the car. It
was time to begin the return journey to Phoenix, a little more slowly and a little more subdued than the journey out had been.

# # #

On October 21, 1961, patrons of New York's Roseland Ballroom were prohibited from dancing "The Twist." In Detroit, Teamster leader Jimmy Hoffa proudly attended the wedding of his daughter Barbara. General Maxwell D. Taylor, special military advisor to President Kennedy, was in South Vietnam, examining the situation firsthand before making a recommendation on whether or not U.S. troops should be sent there. The results of an informal, on-the-street survey were published in the Post. In the survey, each of nine pedestrians in downtown Denver were asked if, to protect their own survival in the case of nuclear war, they would shoot someone who tried to join them in their respective fallout shelters. Eight of the nine replied they would not, at least one of them claiming she was too peaceful to ever hurt anyone. In Greencastle, Indiana, police were looking for the previous tenants of a house wherein the long-dead bodies of four full-term infants had been discovered. Each body had been hidden in and/or under discarded items of refuse in the basement. And a white couple in Rutland, Vermont, was planning further legal action after a court denied their requested adoption of a girl who was one-fourth black.

On October 22, 1961, a headline in the Post asked "Do you think high school students should go steady?" The Bullwinkle Show was a hot new television commodity. In Denver, manslaughter charges were being prepared against a woman who, in the name of punishing her 10-year-old daughter for lying, had beaten the girl to death with a stick and a leather belt; "I guess I spanked her too much," she said. Guerrilla
bands were in the process of being formed by pockets of private citizens throughout the U.S. The avowed purpose of such groups was to protect themselves and their country, and to take charge of the remaining American populace, amid the massive destruction and widespread havoc sure to follow nuclear war. They planned to engage any and all aggressors—whether foreign or domestic—in battle, and expected the majority of such aggressors to be Communists. To these ends, group members were collecting weaponry and were training in the art of guerrilla warfare. Headlines in the Post’s sports section included such tranquil terms as "Blast," "Tramples," "Grinds Past," "Stampede," "Stuns," "Clubs," "Dumps," "Subdue," "Slaughters," and "Crushes." And Judge Phillip B. Gilliam of the Denver Juvenile Court had Tennyson Star Beard moved from juvenile hall to the city jail. Gilliam took this action after reports from juvenile-hall employees indicated that Beard had been behaving in a violent and disruptive manner among the other boys in custody.

On October 23, 1961, the Soviets exploded a 30-megaton bomb in final preparation for the 50-megaton blast scheduled for October 31. An adolescent mental patient at the Colorado State Hospital in Pueblo confessed that he had strangled a fellow patient. Soviet Defense Minister Rodion Y. Malinovsky, trumpeting the formation of a new branch of the Soviet military, expressed his conviction that, in a war, "if it [war] is thrust upon us, the socialist camp will be victorious and capitalism will be destroyed forever." In San Diego, California, a woman was knocked flat in a stampede of eager shoppers at the onset of a rummage sale. After being helped to her feet, she promptly rejoined the battle.
On October 24, 1961, Alamosa, Colorado, had the lowest temperature in the nation at 16° F. Overnight temperatures in Denver had reached a low of 27°. John Wayne's mother and stepfather were injured in an automobile accident a few miles east of Indio, California. The free world was outraged by the Soviets' bomb blast. Much radioactive fallout from the bomb was expected and feared. "Such tests not only contaminate the atmosphere," asserted India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, "but pollute the hearts and minds of people everywhere."

On October 24, 1961, Tennyson Star Beard was arraigned in Denver District Court on charges of first-degree murder, one week to the day after the shooting. Taken before District Judge Saul Pinchick and accompanied by his attorney, Irving Andrews, Beard listened impassively as Court Clerk Charles Riordan read the charges. Andrews, explaining that he needed more time to review the case before recommending a plea to his client, requested and received a one-week continuance. Court action was scheduled to resume on October 31. A deputy sheriff then escorted Beard from the courtroom. Shortly thereafter, Beard was transferred from the city jail to the county jail, where he was to be held without bond.

# # #

When I was six or seven years old, a nine-year-old girl in Aurora, a suburb of Denver, disappeared one day. A couple of days later, her frantic mother made an appeal on television for anyone who knew anything concerning the whereabouts of her daughter to please, please come forward. The woman's voice was grainy with emotion and she cried as she spoke. The girl was found dead several days or weeks
later. She had been murdered by the teenage son of a neighbor and hidden under a toolshed in his family's yard. The body was discovered because of the odor.

A few days after the child was reported missing and long before the body was found, my parents decided to visit the girl's mother, a stranger to them, to offer her comfort and sympathy, and took me along. It was an unusual act, this spontaneous reaching out to someone in pain. We three sat on a sofa with the girl's mother in her living room, and I believe she introduced us to her husband and one or two other children of theirs. The curtains were drawn, leaving the room shadowy, but light brightly silhouetted the rectangular edges of the drapes. The woman was preoccupied with her fear, yet mustered as much sociability as she was able. My parents told her how they had lost a daughter, and my mother hugged me and said, "Thank God we had another one."

I remember my mother saying something similar one or two other times during my childhood—that I was a gift from God to soften their loss. That, in Debbie's absence, they were extra thankful to have me.

And, having lost one of their children, my parents were overprotective of those remaining—especially me, their youngest and the only girl left. As a child, I didn't understand their fear. Their vigilance was confusing and frustrating to me, and I viewed it mainly as a block to my fun. Once, on an overcast day when I was about seven years old, on the way home from where the school bus had let me out, kicking my way through the brown and yellow fallen leaves of autumn, enjoying such depth of satisfaction in the crunching sound as only a child can, I came across a long, grey patch of ice on the sidewalk. I put one foot on the ice and pushed off against the bare pavement with the
other foot. I slid slowly along for a short, cautious distance, and then was ready for efforts more bold. After stepping a few paces back from one end of the ice, as I had seen other children do at other patches of ice, I ran and jumped onto the slick surface and whooshed to the other side, where I hopped off just in time to avoid tripping. I went on to repeat the process several times from each end of the ice—running, jumping, sliding, and hopping off. Then my mother appeared around a corner, wearing her heavy coat, her breath coming in quick puffs in front of her mouth from having been walking quickly. Although it could not have been more than a few minutes past the hour I usually arrived home from school, my mother had come out looking for me, afraid my lateness might have indicated some disaster. She took my hand and led me straight home, the expression on her face showing both relief that I was all right and annoyance with me for having caused her worry.

On another occasion, years later, I was 20-25 minutes late in coming home from high school, and opened the door to find my mother on the verge of calling the police. She may have actually had the phone in her hand and been about to begin dialing when I appeared. I had warned her either that morning or the day before that I would be late due to some activity or other, but she had forgotten.

And there were times I was not allowed to do things other kids were commonly allowed to do. I was seldom permitted out after dark, even as a teenager. I didn't receive my driver's license until I was almost 19, long after most of my peers had theirs. In high school, when a group of my friends went inner-tubing on the Verde River one Saturday, my parents wouldn't let me go because they were afraid I
would drown. It was true that an occasional drowning from inner-tubing did occur somewhere in the state every year, yet that was a very small percentage among the thousands of people who took to the rivers with their giant rubber doughnuts every summer weekend. Countless parents considered inner-tubing to be reasonably safe, harmless fun, and had few qualms about allowing their teenage children to go. Perhaps none of them had lost a daughter.

# # #

On October 25, 1961, the fashion vanguard declared that the spike heel and pointed toe would soon be phenomena of the past. In Saigon, General Taylor expressed optimism that South Vietnam could prevail in its struggle against North Vietnam. The district board of education governing the Golden, Colorado, area allotted an additional $9,400 to the construction budget of a south-side junior high school. It was specified that these funds were to be used for properly fortifying the school's cafeteria so that it could double as a fallout shelter. Some of the littlest Christians frequenting Denver's St. Luke's Episcopal Church, which held regular chapel services for children ages three to five, were under the impression that the rector, Reverend James Brock, was God. In Aurora, plans were being made for a local UNICEF drive to aid the world's needy. The drive called for area youngsters to collect money door-to-door on Halloween. Mrs. Melbourne Blatchley, chairwoman of this project, stated that "a dime can buy enough DDT to protect a child from malaria for a year." A six-year-old Chicago girl was strangled by her father, who then committed suicide. In a note he left behind, the man stated that he'd killed his daughter because he "didn't want her to grow up in this sad world." Nat "King" Cole decried the scarcity of Negroes in the field of
television. And Jerry L. Yost, chief probation officer for the Juvenile Department of Adams County Court in Brighton, Colorado, decried the scarcity of state treatment facilities for emotionally disturbed juvenile delinquents, and cited the Beard case as an example.

October 25, 1961, was also my third birthday. I do not know in what manner the day passed at 1821 Vine Street, Denver, Colorado--the home of the Humphrey family. One child increased a notch in age, while another would be forever 14 years old.

In the days between October 25 and October 31, 1961, the world was terrorized by American-Soviet discord in Berlin, the threat of nuclear destruction, the dangers of radioactive fallout, and the situation in South Vietnam. While U.S. and Soviet tanks aimed their guns at each other from opposite sides of the East-West border in Berlin, the heads of state involved fired rhetoric at one another. The Soviets detonated their 50-megaton bomb a day early. Fallout from the previous blast had nearly completed a round-the-world journey, having drifted over much of the Northern Hemisphere, and was soon expected back over Russia. Ann Landers's advice column began appearing in The Denver Post, debuting with a letter concerning fallout shelters. In this letter, a young wife and mother explained that she and her family had saved up enough money to build either a rec room or a fallout shelter, and asked Ann which of these she thought would be the wiser choice. Ann voted for the shelter, asserting that "people who fail to take every reasonable precaution are stupid fools." Hostilities in Southeast Asia were steadily escalating: the 803rd Regiment of the 324th Division of the North Vietnamese Army was known to have pierced the northern borders of
South Vietnam, and Cambodia was busy invading the delta region in the south.

Between October 25 and October 31, 1961, five Negroes who had stopped for a meal while on their way from New York to Washington, D.C., for a human-rights convention were arrested for trespassing at a Baltimore diner when they declined to leave after having been refused service. Amid much fanfare, the U.S. launched the Saturn—the largest rocket ever launched up to that time. A Negro in Battle Creek, Michigan, asked a rich Texas man for the fare to Africa. The Texan had previously extended the offer to pay the one-way fare out of the country for any Communists or Socialists who wished to leave the U.S. and who agreed to disclaim their American citizenship. The Negro was not a Communist or a Socialist; instead, he had had enough of American racial prejudice. A controversial new study pointed to a possible relationship between cigarettes and early death. Ossie Davis, actor-playwright, averred that humor was the best approach to the topic of segregation. His new play, *Purlie Victorious*, was filled with slapstick aimed at highlighting the absurdity of segregation. The cast and crew of *Lawrence of Arabia* were in Jordan, having entered the early days of an anticipated 10 months of filming. Colorado State Representative Elizabeth E. Pellet refuted Probation Officer Jerry L. Yost's earlier assertion that treatment facilities for juvenile delinquents in the state of Colorado were grossly inadequate. And the Humphrey family, aware that the only true justice would have been for Debbie to have lived a long and fulfilling life, hoped for what substitute justice the legal institutions could provide for them, and waited for the plea.

#   #   #
I wonder if my parents spent much time in church during the days and weeks following Debbie's death. My mother has told me that Debbie was religious, that she had believed in Jesus and goodness and The Golden Rule. Until I was about five years old, my parents and I went to a neighborhood church on Sundays, they attending the service and I attending Sunday school. Then we stopped going, and my formal religious education came to an end. Until that time, however, on Sundays my parents would garb themselves such as I have seldom seen them otherwise, my mother in her finest dress and nicest shoes and my father in a suit and tie. They would adorn me in a ruffly little-girl dress, and the three of us would walk to the church in the morning, one of many small, colorfully attired groups doing likewise. With its towering steeple and tall arched windows, the church must have looked a little like a fairy-tale castle to me. The exterior was painted a bright white like the icing on a wedding cake, so white it made the eyes water and blink to look at it in the morning sunshine.

The main door to the church led into a mysterious adult world of speech and concepts which I found unfathomable and dull, and which made me fidget and pluck at my dress in boredom on those rare occasions when my parents took me with them to the service. On most Sundays, before going in at the main door, my parents escorted me up the stairs on the left side of the church to the Sunday-school room. The stairs were disproportionately high for little legs and I stepped up onto each one carefully, holding tight onto the hand of either my mother or my father, always leading with the right foot, and not alternating feet as grown-ups do. As my parents went back down the stairs, I joined the other little children in the Sunday-school room. In this room, we small
ones learned that Jesus loved little children and that He wanted us to always tell the truth and be kind to others. We learned songs and Bible verses and how to make the shape of a church with our hands while reciting “Here is the church and here is the steeple. Open the doors and see all the people!”

Though I was shy and seldom spoke to her, I liked my Sunday-school teacher very much. While I don’t remember her name, I do remember that she was pretty and gentle and sweet. And, contrary to the fact that I thought her quite old, she was in reality a very young woman. She still lived in her parents’ house, and the last Easter before my parents and I stopped going to church, she held an Easter-egg hunt at that house for her Sunday-school class. Although it was probably just an average middle-class dwelling, I thought the home was beautiful. It had plush, cornflower-blue carpeting and contained such wonders as a piano and an inside staircase ascending to the second floor. The wooden furniture was a rich, dark brown and shining with fresh polish. In the living room, the lacy white curtains were open and the sun beaming in made the area glow with welcome and comfort. I had never before been in a home so nice. All my childhood memories of home are images from many years spent living in a succession of single-wide trailers, at least one of which was quite attractive inside, but most were smallish and poor. At the time I went to the Easter-egg hunt, my family and I were living in an Airstream and none of us had much space to ourselves, not that this bothered me greatly when I was so young.

At the hunt, I had trouble finding the Easter eggs, which, rather than real eggs, were hollow, brightly colored, plastic egg-shaped globes,
filled with small candies and toys. The other children were squealing and laughing as they located the eggs seemingly everywhere—in corners, under chairs, beside the piano, beneath the sofa cushions. There were frequent cries of "I found one!" but I couldn't find any at all. I was becoming a little upset when the Sunday-school teacher gently took my arm, led me a few feet across the room, and pointed to an egg hidden behind the sofa. I inhaled suddenly with delighted surprise, then quickly knelt, reached behind the sofa, and seized my egg. Although that was the only Easter egg I collected that Sunday, I was happy.

When the hunt was over and all the eggs found, the Sunday-school teacher gave every child a gift, all the same size and shape, wrapped in colorful paper and tied with a bow. When I opened mine later, I discovered, contained within a white cardboard box and folded protectively inside a sheet of tissue paper, a copy of the New Testament, small for small hands. It had a pale pink cover and gilt-edged pages and contained full-color illustrations of favorite Bible scenes. The teacher knew we were too young then to understand the words, but she must have hoped we would keep the books until such time as we could read them with meaning. I have mine yet, though I seldom take it in my hands and look at it, or, more seldom still, open the pages and read.

I don't know precisely why my parents chose to discontinue their churchgoing, and I don't recall that I missed Sunday school to any significant degree, readily finding other diversions for those newly free Sunday mornings. I know that my mother, while rarely speaking of it, maintained a quiet faith. Debbie was in heaven and we--my parents, my brothers, and I--would all surely join her someday. She would meet
each of us when our time on earth was completed and would introduce us to the wonders of God's home. In my mother's philosophy of religion, no one goes to hell. Upon death, all are forgiven and rise immediately to heaven.

My father does not take such a simple, loving approach to religion. While my mother's faith may have been buttressed by the need to believe that Debbie still exists somewhere and that she is happy, perhaps my father doubts a God who could allow a child—his child—to die of a gunshot wound to the head. I suspect that my father's doubt grew stronger during the first few years following Debbie's death and that my parents stopped going to church when his doubt became too strong and when anger had consumed more of his soul. My mother, out of loyalty to her husband, because she did not deem it right to carry on outside activities unaccompanied by my father, probably chose not to go to places of worship without him. Thereafter, my parents entered churches only for the respective weddings of my two brothers.

From time to time during my childhood, my father had some poker-hot words to say about God, which he jabbed at his family and himself and at a silent, unseen, unknowable, inscrutable Being. One such occasion began with my father reading a book at the kitchen table, his back to us, while my mother and I were a few yards away in the living room, watching on the family's small black-and-white television a reverent Hollywood epic based on the Book of Genesis. The images were flickering blue-grey on the screen and a sonorous voice was narrating the creation of the earth, when my father looked up from his book and said with vehemence that it was stupid to believe that God had created the world, stupid to believe in His existence. My father
turned around in his seat and continued speaking in this vein for some minutes, his voice raised in bitter anger, my mother timidly trying to quiet him.

Such verbal attacks directed toward God Himself were rare. While my father had many disparaging things to say about religion, he generally confined his criticisms to the constructs of man rather than fixing on those of God. My father's rough words concerning organized religion, hypocrites, and zealous self-righteousness were commonly more true than not. He often commented insightfully on such subjects as the dubious value of the considerable amount of church-related dogma and ceremony that exists by man's design and not God's, churchgoers who don their religion on Sundays in much the same manner as they don their clothing, and his observation that thousands of people have been murdered, in faceless masses and individually, in times of war and in times of peace, by those claiming to function according to the word of God. My father once declared that, in his estimation, more people had been killed in the name of God throughout the history of the world than for any other reason. However, he did not seem to blame God for this, recognizing instead that the guilt lay with those persons who had used God's name for their own ends.

Suspicious of religion, my father was sometimes impatient with those who tried to spread it. One weekend afternoon during my early adolescence, a sweet-faced girl in a prim flowered dress came to our home. She was about my age and I smiled at her as I opened the door. A woman who may have been her mother stood protectively behind her at a small distance. The girl held a Bible in her hands and asked if I would allow her to read a few verses to me. Although my family was
just sitting down to lunch, I agreed, not wishing to seem rude. Standing on the steps that led up from our patio to the door of our trailer, the girl opened her Bible to a ribbon-marked page and began to read. She could not see my family seated at their chairs in our kitchen or our small table laden with plates, glasses, flatware, and steaming food. She read quickly and with gentle conviction, and I believe she would have finished in a moment and gone on to visit each of our neighbors in turn, endeavoring to bring a little of the light of God into as many homes as possible.

"Jenny, come to lunch!" my father called sharply from the kitchen.

The girl stopped in midsentence and looked questioningly up at me. We were silent in shared embarrassment for a second or two, then I said, "I'm sorry. I've got to go." I smiled apologetically and she smiled shyly back as she turned to leave. I hadn't really wanted to hear her Bible verses but had seen no harm in letting her read them through and feel she'd done some good.

My father was not consistently negative in his views of religion, however. When I was small, one of his favorite movies was The Song of Bernadette. The story was of a French girl in her early teens who had visions of the Virgin Mary. Jennifer Jones, with dark, wavy hair and ingenuous wide eyes, played the title role. When the movie was on television, as it was maybe twice during the years I was between five and ten years old, my father convinced my mother to let me stay up a little later than usual, to watch along with him. I recall those occasions, sitting next to him on the sofa in the dark, as among the few times I felt true togetherness with my father. Although our family was not Catholic, my father and I loved the movie about St. Bernadette. I loved the movie
for itself and because my father loved it, and because he showed his love for me as we watched it side by side. And I think he loved the movie, primary among any other reasons, because it reminded him of another dark-haired, innocent-eyed teenage girl who had believed in God.

At least once during my childhood, my father put serious effort into exploring religion. This undertaking began early one evening when I was maybe 10 or 12 years old, during a time of year when it was still light outside after dinner. As my mother was washing the last few dishes, two young men, who must have been in their early to mid-twenties, knocked on our door. They were dressed in suits and ties, their hair was short and neatly combed, and they were freshly shaven. They had honest, friendly smiles and each looked about as warm and wholesome as whole-wheat muffins fresh from the oven. They were Mormons, and they wanted to talk to us about their faith. My parents, in a surprisingly receptive mood, invited them into our home. My mother offered them a seat, which they accepted, and some cola, which they did not. She then offered iced tea, which they also refused. The men explained that Mormons are prohibited from consuming such things and indicated that plain water would be fine. My mother, relieved she could offer them some beverage they would accept, handed them each a large glass filled with cold water and ice.

The men were pleasant, articulate, and earnest, and my father talked with them for a good long while. Sometime well after dusk had darkened to night, they rose to go. They left a Book of Mormon with my father, and he read it carefully from cover to cover over the next several days. The young men came to visit one or two more times, and
my father spoke with them at length each time. He wanted to believe, and he tried hard to do so, yet in the end he couldn’t, and the men stopped coming.

For as long as I can remember, my father has had a respect for religion at the same time he has held a contempt for it and a distrust of it. He has wanted to know the love of God but could not stop railing against God’s unresponsiveness and seemingly arbitrary decisions concerning the lives of human beings. I envision my father standing on a road, at one end of which is acceptance of God and at the other end is anger toward and rejection of God. He cannot travel toward one end of the road without wondering if the other end holds more truth, and so, for decades, he has wandered back and forth, never able to more than pause near one end or the other, or somewhere in between.

# # #

On October 31, 1961, two weeks to the day after the shooting, a plea of not guilty by reason of insanity was entered before Judge Pinchick in the Tennyson Star Beard case. Beard remained silent during the courtroom procedure. After the plea was entered--by Irving Andrews, Beard’s attorney--Pinchick issued an order for Beard to undergo a 30-day psychiatric examination within the confines of the Colorado State Hospital at Pueblo. The purpose of the examination was to determine whether or not Beard was truly insane at the time of the shooting. If found insane, it was unlikely Beard would be prosecuted on the murder charge. If found sane, a murder trial would be scheduled and Beard would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. To allow time for the examination, the case was continued once again--to December 1.
Between October 31 and December 1, 1961, the world marched on in its relentless way. Thanksgiving came and went. A few early Santas appeared at local department stores. The U.S. congratulated itself on the second successful test-firing of a Minuteman ICBM. A Georgia state law obliging the disbursement of educational-expense grants to children wishing to attend private schools was upheld in superior court. The purpose of the law was to protect white children from being compelled to mingle with Negroes within the integrated public-school system. While participating in a fox hunt, Jackie Kennedy fell off a horse. "The horse stopped. Mrs. Kennedy didn't," said photographer Marshall Hawkins. Bob Newhart expressed doubt regarding his prospects for a lengthy career in television. JFK, Jr., celebrated his first birthday, and Caroline Kennedy celebrated her fourth. Michael Rockefeller, 23, the youngest son of Nelson A., disappeared in the wilds of Dutch New Guinea, where he had gone hoping to buy shrunken heads from a tribe of head-hunting natives.

Fallout from the Soviets' big bomb spread itself generously around the Northern Hemisphere. Prince Edward County in Virginia, which had responded to public-school integration by simply closing its public schools in 1959 while maintaining all-white private schools, was ordered by the Virginia Supreme Court to recommence operation of its public institutions. In the two-year span since the closure of the county's public facilities, the nearly 2,000 school-age Negro residents of the area had been left with virtually no access to classroom education. Denver's Ackerman-Hirsch store had a sale on men's iridescent gabardine slacks. Zsa Zsa Gabor's palatial home was burned to the ground when an intense brush fire roared through a wealthy Southern
California neighborhood. A chimpanzee named Enos was launched into space, orbited the earth twice, and splashed down southeast of Bermuda. Later the same day, John Glenn was chosen to be the first human to follow in Enos's hairy footsteps.

Cassius Clay, 19, who had won nine out of nine fights since turning professional a year earlier, won yet another. A small, wheat-based wafer was heralded as a possible solution to the problem of fallout-shelter food. The wafers could be served in a variety of ways, including plain, topped with spreads, as filler in casseroles, or with milk and sugar like breakfast cereal. It was announced that Negroes were no longer legally hindered from playing baseball in the Class AA Southern Association after the final judicial obstacle—a Birmingham city regulation prohibiting the mixing of races on athletic fields—was found unconstitutional in federal court. Brown was revealed in an informal survey of Denver beauty salons to be the most requested color of hair dye. Freeing Marlon Brando from what he had earlier referred to as the "worst experience" he had ever suffered as an actor, *Mutiny on the Bounty* completed its shooting schedule.

A cure for cancer was expected in the near future, possibly even within a year or two. Alabama Governor John Patterson, searching for a means to justify segregation in the face of federal antiracism laws, paid—from state emergency funds—for an anthropological study designed to demonstrate that Negroes are significantly less intelligent than whites. Ralph Smith, Gov. Patterson's attorney in all race-related matters, supported this action, stating that "we should explore every avenue in our efforts to preserve racial segregation." Atida Paz, who had represented Israel in the 1961 Miss Universe Pageant, and who'd been
conscripted into the Israeli Army, stated that one of the most unpleasant things about basic training was "not being able to use nail polish or lipstick." A London butler, unshakably dedicated to the preservation of decorum in his employers' home, who had been informed of his master's shotgun suicide by his master's wife--"Frederick," she'd said, "the earl has shot himself in the study"--proceeded to neaten up around the body before summoning the police.

A letter to the editor protesting the murder charge levied against Beard appeared in the Post. The writer of the letter implied that, since Beard had not intended to kill Debbie but someone else instead, Debbie's death was an accidental one and should have been treated as such. And merchants in Westminster, Colorado, along with the Westminster Police Department, were planning to distribute thousands of copies of a child-safety pamphlet to local school children. The pamphlet, entitled It's Great to Be Alive, offered cautionary information on such topics as fire, bicycle use, and discarded refrigerators.

In my early twenties, at an age when I was discovering the surprisingly expansive limits of my self-reliance, a vociferous, dented old car underscored my vulnerability one summer evening. I had been living and working in Washington State for a couple of years, among the small towns and big trees and frequent, cleansing rains. My home was in a quiet valley among the foothills of the western flank of the Cascade Mountains. Many such valleys looped around and between the foothills, each small valley joining with a larger valley, larger valleys joining with those still larger, converging on the wide, green expanse of the valley bearing the name Skagit, which leads eventually to the deep blue-grey
of Puget Sound. It was farming country, and rivers of cropland flowed along the valley floors, splashing a little way up a hillside here and there, leaving the higher slopes inviolate. The hills remained heavily forested, bearing a thick cover of hemlock and Douglas fir, a dusky, darker shade of green than the plowed fields and pasture lands below.

From the floor of the Skagit Valley, past the foothills rising one upon the other, on clear days the white-enamed teeth of the high Cascades themselves could be seen some 50 miles away, jagged and shining and beautiful. My job with the Forest Service regularly took me far up into the mountains, among the steep, green heights where splashing, cold streams did their falling dances, sparkling and whispering as they leapt down the rocks. Yet I had never been so high or as deep into the mountains as to walk where the snow never melts away to bare earth in summer, and I had never seen the other side of the mountains, the opposite face, the eastern flank—the face which looked out away from the direction of my valley rather than toward.

So one Friday afternoon in July I decided to drive up into the mountains, over them, and down along the other side, just to see what was there. My motorized magic carpet for this venture was an old Plymouth Fury, springy due to bad shock absorbers, creaky, and with a loud, grumbling engine which, when being started, sounded like an old man thunderously clearing his throat. I had purchased the car, which I'd then affectionately dubbed the Big Blue Beast, only a few weeks earlier, for what was to me at that time in my life a large sum—$400.

I placed onto the back seat of the Beast some items basic to an overnight trip—simple toiletries, a change of clothing, snacks, a one-quart canteen of drinking water, etc.—and set out on my little journey
of discovery. I headed toward the mountains on Highway 20, which I knew crossed over the top of the Cascades, threading its way between the white peaks. As I approached the towering mountains, the foothills which passed on either side of me grew larger and larger until they themselves became mountains. And while I continued up, up the steepening road, the Beast growling sonorously and steadily in its labors, these green, smaller mountains fell away behind and beneath me as I neared the snow-encrusted, treeless thrusts of rock that jabbed up at the translucent blue, china-fragile sky.

At Rainy Pass, the point where Highway 20 reaches its greatest elevation in the Cascades, I pulled over and stopped near an embankment of snow which had been left alongside the blacktop by a snowplow some months earlier. This snow, once soft and easily scooped from the road surface by the curved blade of the plow, had since undergone many episodes of melting and freezing and was now thickly glazed with a shell of clear ice, smooth like glass and with numerous jewel-like bubbles trapped within.

Although it had been warm down near my home, it was cold among the jutting peaks, and I pulled on my jacket, securing the buttons. I stood and looked out at the snaggy-topped mountains, sharp like serrated knives against the sky. Surveying the deep troughs between the steep-sided crags, I saw interlacing lines of rushing water --each a soft, greyish, cottony white against the brighter white of the snow and the wet black of exposed rock.

Back in the car, I continued my journey, the road twisting downward now, leaving a long, black, looping mark across the eastern brow of the mountains. Soon I was back below the treeline, steering
through dark stands of tall, thick pines. Near the base of the mountains, I came to a little town called Winthrop, where I had planned to spend the night. Glancing at my watch, I discovered there were still a couple of daylight hours left, and, rather than spending those hours in having a meal and finding a place to sleep, I decided to explore a bit further. I turned onto a small dirt road heading back up into the mountains from Winthrop, into the Okanogan National Forest. As I drove, dust puffed up behind the car, trailing from the back bumper like a huge, beige scarf in the gentle wind. The trees clustered close to the edge of the road and cast long shadows in the slanting sunlight. The smell of pine swirled in eddies in the air. The road was narrow and winding, and on the left was a sharp dropoff into a deep, sheer-sided ravine. I drove far into the mountains, enjoying my solitude among the trees and cliffs, letting the scenery be my companion, frequently slowing the car to relish the views.

The sun dropped too quickly behind the Cascades and the light began to grow dim. Suddenly, at nearly 10:00 p.m., when I was perhaps 25 miles from Winthrop, a loud, deep-toned howl burst forth from the Beast, violently interrupting my nature-filled reveries. Clouds of vapor rushed upward from beneath the hood. The engine had overheated and the radiator was screaming in steamy agony. Then, as if on cue, the oil warning light popped on, the red glow telling me I had more than one problem with which to contend.

I pulled over at the first possible place, which happened to be on the left side of the road, on the very lip of the dropoff. I turned off the engine and sat quietly in the car for a few minutes, glaring morosely out the window over the edge of the ravine, and down, way down,
hundreds of feet down to the stream skipping along the gash's rocky bottom. Darkness swiftly filled the ravine from the base upward, then spread across the mountaintops as the sky turned from light blue to navy. The first stars glowed brightly as night advanced across the landscape, and, after the Beast stopped its unearthly howling and hissing, the only sounds were the whoosh of the breeze in the treetops and the muffled surging and churning of the water in the ravine.

I had not brought along extra vital fluids for the Beast. I'd topped off both the oil and water before leaving home and had naively supposed this to be sufficient. It was clear I would be spending the night in these mountains as there wasn't much I could do in the dark. Deciding that the brink of a sheer cliff was not a wise place to park overnight, I restarted the engine and began coaxing the car farther along, looking for a place to pull over on the right side of the road, against the hillside and away from the precipice. The radiator began to moan and then shriek, and the oil light glared accusingly up at me from the dashboard as I searched the beam of the headlights for a safer spot to park. I didn't have to go far before I found a dirt patch on the right just wide enough to comfortably accommodate the Beast, parallel to a small roadside ditch that ran along the base of the roadcut.

Not wishing to roll over the cliff in the night, I briefly got out of the car and gathered a few large rocks, placing one firmly behind each wheel. It was truly dark by that time, and there, among the tall trees and deeply shadowed mountains, I felt profoundly isolated. Back in the car, I sat in the dark, glumly munching handfuls of the granola I had brought along for the trip. I accepted with a sigh my stupid lack of oil and water and, like Scarlett, decided to "think about it tomorrow." My
greatest immediate concern had to do with something else, as I began to think of all the stories of random violence that had stuck in my mind over the years—stories I had read in the newspaper or seen on television or been told by other people. I thought about the endless accounts of rape, murder, and general mayhem that were forever in the news. I thought of innocent people maimed and left to die, crazy people with axes, and evil people with evil intentions. It is not uncommon for the bodies of young women to be found on wooded mountainsides, and I was afraid.

I slept in my car that night, with the doors locked and three windows rolled up tight, leaving a single window open no more than half an inch. I left the keys in the ignition and slept on the front seat so I could attempt a rapid getaway if such were to become necessary. I knew that if I had to flee in my car I wouldn't be able to cover much distance before the engine would die, but at least I'd have a chance to get a head start on any pursuer. And too, I realized, a moving vehicle can be a powerful weapon, even if it doesn't go very far.

I awoke to see gold and silver beads of dew sparkling brilliantly on the windshield. I stretched and rubbed my head where I had bumped it on the bottom of the steering wheel a few times during the night. Sitting up, I looked out the driver's-side window at a bright blue sky. The early-morning sunshine illuminated the mountaintops, the walls of the ravine, and much of the stretch of road along which I was parked. I breathed in the cold air with its scent of pine and got out of the car. I didn't feel so vulnerable in the light, which is a common though somewhat nonsensical state of mind: a trust in light to keep one safe. However, at least I would be able to see at a distance anyone who
might approach me, and thus I could keep a protective barrier of space around myself. I put on and buttoned my jacket, which I had used as a blanket while I slept.

My first order of the day was to find some water for the radiator. Reaching the water in the ravine was clearly impossible, so, after drinking the remaining few swallows in my canteen, I began walking down the road, back the way I had come, empty canteen in hand. I looked and listened for any sign of water, hoping to find at least a steady drip somewhere. Before I had traveled even a hundred feet, I came across a tiny seep in the roadcut, at about shoulder height. Near the top of the seep, the water oozed slowly out of the soil and down the moss-covered rocks, looking more like a slug trail than a trickle of water. It picked up in volume as it neared the base of the roadcut and dribbled off the rocks and into the roadside ditch, where it pooled up and flowed a few feet before soaking back into the earth.

Because of the shallowness of the water in the ditch, I could dip only a few ounces at a time into my canteen. I made many trips to and from the seep, pouring each meager offering into the Plymouth, screening the dirt particles from the water by stretching a rag across the mouth of the radiator. Back and forth I went for at least an hour, occasionally huffing on my exposed hands to warm them, my face tingling and red in the cold mountain air. Finally, the water level in the radiator rose into view and I replaced the radiator cap, pressing hard to secure it.

Solving the oil problem, I thought, wasn't going to be so easy, since there was little probability of finding a nearby seep of motor oil. Pulling out the dipstick, I discovered only a miniscule amount of dark
oiling clinging with embarrassment to the very tip. I reflected that I might be able to get to Winthrop without damaging the engine, but I didn't want to chance it. After all, it was a beautiful Saturday morning in the full of summer. Surely there would be campers and picnickers and sightseers out on a day like this and, sooner or later, one would likely drive by. And maybe he or she would have an extra can of oil.

I didn't have long to wait before I heard an engine just up the road ahead. I turned and saw that a dark-blue, late-model van had come around the curve and was headed toward me. I stood next to my car with its open hood, positioned near the driver's door and ready to jump in and slam down the lock button if so obliged, and watched the blue van as it approached and stopped in the middle of the road, parallel to the Beast but pointing the other way.

The driver was a big black man in his middle thirties, with a heavy jaw and shiny skin. His only passenger, whom I couldn't see as well, was a white man. The driver smiled affably at me and asked if I was having any trouble.

"I'm nearly out of oil," I replied, remaining near the safety of my car. "Don't suppose you'd have any extra I could buy?"

He looked at me a little strangely. "No, I'm afraid not," he said. "No extra. But, you know, there's a campground right up the road." He motioned with his head, indicating the direction from which he had come, the direction in which I'd been going when my car had overheated.

"There is?" I asked with surprise, feeling foolish.

"Yeah. It's just a little ways. Might be somebody there you could get some oil from."
I thanked the man and he drove on. I looked up the road and couldn't see far. The narrow dirt ribbon made a sharp curve to the right and disappeared behind a steep wooded slope. I locked the Beast and began to walk. As I rounded the curve, my feeling of foolishness deepened. There, not 300 feet from where I had felt so cosmically alone in the night, was a campground occupied by several tents and camp trailers. While I had been engaged in much black speculation concerning prowling rapists and lone axe-murderers, the relative safety of numbers had awaited me less than five minutes away—campers who'd probably spent the evening telling tall tales and roasting marshmallows. The intervening hillside and its forest cover had hidden any sight, sound, or smell of the campground from me. I laughed softly and shook my head.

The person nearest to the road was a lone, fortyish man kneeling by a campfire, frying bacon in an iron skillet. The bacon had a rich aroma and sizzled and popped as the man turned over each curling strip with a small spatula. He was dressed in a flannel shirt and blue jeans and hadn't yet combed his hair for the day. I approached him and stopped just beyond his arm's reach. I greeted the man and he grunted reluctantly in acknowledgment, glancing up at me as he flipped another slice. I explained that I was nearly out of oil and asked if he had an extra quart I could buy. He was silent for a moment, then responded without looking at me.

"Should've checked your oil before you left home."

I told him that indeed I had but that it hadn't done me any good. After another silence, he said, "I've only got one. Thirty-weight."
I asked him if a dollar would be enough and he sourly agreed that it would. He straightened up and withdrew a can of oil from a nearby pickup truck with a camper shell. Then he handed me the oil and I handed him the dollar.

As I thanked the man, he stuffed the bill deep into his hip pocket. He immediately reverted to tending his bacon and didn't speak to me again.

I poured the oil into the Beast, carefully turned the car around, and began the drive back to Winthrop. In town, I stopped at a rickety old gas station that looked as if it had been thrown together from bits of scrap lumber and probably hadn't seen a coat of paint in 40 years. I filled the gas tank with gasoline, the oil reservoir with oil, and my canteen with drinking water. I bought an extra quart of motor oil and placed it on the floor behind the passenger's seat. Then I turned west onto Highway 20, and headed for home.

During the drive back over the mountains, I pondered the vagaries of life and my own frailties. I found it somewhat ironic that, when I had been stranded the previous evening, I had not been particularly frightened by the immediate facts of the situation itself. A nonoperative vehicle, deep in the mountains, at night, many miles from the nearest town, little food, little water--these basic matters had not really made me afraid. Annoyed, yes, and unhappy, but not afraid. I knew that I would either find oil and water in the morning or I would not. And if I had not, I would've walked to town. There was no chance of getting lost--all I had to do was follow the road. I wouldn't have died of starvation or thirst because the eight or nine hours without food and water that it would've taken me to make the return journey to
Winthrop by foot would not have done me much harm. I wasn't afraid of hypothermia—I had warm clothing, and besides, it was summer and the greater part of the day would've been pleasantly warm. I wasn't afraid of being eaten by bears or wolves—I had spent enough time in the outdoors to know better. The only aspect of the situation that had made me feel fear--jumpy, fist-clenching fear--was the possibility of attack by members of my own species. The possibility of random violence.

# # #

On December 1, 1961, Judge Pinchick received a report concerning the sanity of Tennyson Star Beard. This report, prepared by Dr. Glenn V. Karcher, staff psychiatrist at the Colorado State Hospital, stated Dr. Karcher's conclusions that Beard had been insane on the date of the incident in question and had remained insane throughout his stay at the hospital. Later in the day, appearing before Judge Pinchick with his client, Irving Andrews asked that a sanity trial be scheduled for the near future. Overriding the objections of the deputy district attorney, David Little, who requested more time to prepare, Judge Pinchick chose December 19, 1961, as the date and 9:15 a.m. as the time.

Between December 1 and December 19, 1961, Denver went through a record cold spell. The U.S. was busy making plans to get a man on the moon by 1970. In Clarksdale, Mississippi, several Negroes who had been avoiding doing business with white, racially biased shopkeepers were arrested on allegations of "withholding trade." Denver City Hall's annual Christmas-light display was set up and switched on. JFK got a head cold. Joseph Kennedy had a stroke. Wilma Rudolph won the Associated Press Award as female athlete of the year.
for 1961, the second consecutive year she had done so. In Albany, Georgia, more than 100 Negroes who had been standing outside Albany's City Hall to protest the local jailing of 11 peaceful antisegregation activists were arrested for obstructing the sidewalk. In New Orleans, an antisegregation demonstration was brought to a halt when the demonstrators were arrested on charges of parading without a permit. Christmas shoppers in Denver filled stores of all kinds and purchased countless items of every description, leading to the most lucrative preholiday buying frenzy in the city's history. In the Post, an ad for a child's toy on sale at Dave Cook Sporting Goods proclaimed:

AS SEEN ON TV!
MATTEL
SNUB-NOSE
.38 SET
2.38
REG.
$4.00!

In the U.S. Post Office in Tulsa, Oklahoma, a long-lost postcard dated 1913 was found. Signed by someone named Sam, the postcard stated, "Hear the Kaiser is acting up. Hope there won't be trouble." Natalie Wood made a pair of footprints in a patch of wet concrete on the sidewalk in front of Grauman's Chinese Theatre, becoming the latest participant in a decades-old Hollywood tradition. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., was arrested in Albany, Georgia, while participating in an antisegregation demonstration. In Mississippi, Hodding Carter--prominent newspaperman and former recipient of the Pulitzer Prize--was burned in effigy for publicly opposing segregation. Carter wryly declared this event to have been a major advance in social conscience,
contrasting it favorably with the days when "some Mississippians used to burn people in the flesh" rather than in effigy. The Denver Post was filled with Christmas-related articles; subjects included local performances of Handel's Messiah and Tchaikovsky's The Nutcracker Suite, safe holiday driving, the annual Santa Claus Parade, gift giving, donating to the needy, keeping Christ in Christmas, and the premieres of holiday-season films.

On December 19, 1961, Tennyson Star Beard was found not guilty by reason of insanity. This ruling was based on the psychiatric opinion of Dr. Karcher, who testified that Beard was a paranoid schizophrenic and had likely been insane for several years. Karcher stated that Beard was hallucinatory, delusional, and adamant in denying his own unsoundness of mind. Karcher told the court that Beard did not believe he had killed Deborah Humphrey. Instead, according to Karcher, Beard was under the persistent impression that it was William Hachmeister whom he had shot to death and Mr. Rapp who had been wounded. The prosecution offered no testimony to contradict Dr. Karcher's findings.

Judge Pinchick ordered that Beard be committed to the Colorado State Hospital at Pueblo until such time as Beard became, in Judge Pinchick's words, "restored to reason." Dr. Karcher stated that it would probably take 10 or 15 years of treatment before Beard would be fit to be released. Karcher tempered this estimate, however, by implying that a high degree of uncertainty was inherent in such a time table, explaining that it was not possible to truly know when, or if, Beard would ever recover.
I do not know the eventual length of Tennyson Star Beard's sojourn at the Colorado State Hospital. I know that he is not a patient there today, but the confidentiality of medical records prevents the staff from revealing in what year he was released. I have no easy way of discovering whether or not he did ultimately spend 10 or 15 years in the hospital, or if his stay turned out to be significantly shorter or longer than was forecast by Karcher. I don't know if Beard ever became a useful member of society, if he ever came to feel remorse for Debbie's death, if he ever began a family of his own. I don't know if Beard still lives in Colorado, or, indeed, if he is still alive at all.

Was Tennyson Star Beard really crazy during the latter months of 1961? Possibly. The insanity plea is often used as a convenient defense in murder cases, yet it cannot be denied there are those persons who are truly insane.

And what of the issue of race? The Post carefully avoided explicit mention of race in the Tennyson Star Beard matter, perhaps in an effort to avoid stirring up local racial unrest. Yet I know from a photograph in the Post that William Hachmeister was white. Was Michael Smith also white? I infer from the situation that he probably was. How about the unnamed girl to whom both Beard and Smith had been attracted? I suspect she also was white. And Mr. Rapp? He was a man in a position of authority during a time when blacks were not often allowed to assume much authority, so he too was likely to have been white. I think back to Beard's statement that Smith, sometime prior to the shooting, had been referring to Beard by "certain bad names." Exactly what "bad names" were those, I wonder. Had Smith been calling Beard "nigger" or "monkey boy"? Did racial insult act as the catalyst for
Beard's explosion of violence on October 17, 1961? Conceivably so, crazy or not. Yet that doesn't exonerate him. Is it possible Rapp handled Beard unfairly, that he treated Beard more harshly than he would have treated a white student? Perhaps, but that doesn't justify murder and attempted murder.

Appearing in the December 1, 1961, issue of the Post is a photograph of Beard and his attorney, Irving Andrews, standing side by side in the courtroom. In this photo, Beard is dressed in a simple striped shirt—recognizably the same one he'd worn on the day of his arrest—while Andrews is clad in a suit and tie. Disregarding the differences in apparel, I am struck by how much the two of them physically resemble each other, although Andrews is a number of years older and a few inches taller than Beard. The shapes of their heads are nearly identical—cleanly curved, elongated ovals. Their hair is similarly cropped, and their facial features are remarkably alike. They could have been brothers, or even the same person at different points in time. In my ruminations, it has occurred to me that possibly the only real difference between Beard and Andrews was that Andrews had succeeded in a racially biased system while Beard catastrophically had not. I ask again, was Beard really crazy? Maybe. Had racism helped to make him crazy? Who knows? In 1961, open discrimination was widely practiced in this country, and masses of people were arrested for demanding a thing as straightforward and self-evident as fair consideration. Beard was surely fundamentally affected by the racial climate of the times: It can hardly have been otherwise. In the course of my research of the era and of the circumstances surrounding Debbie's death, I have come to feel a measure of sympathy for Beard—
occurrence I had not anticipated. Beard, an African-American, had reason to be frustrated with the white system. I have some understanding of such frustration—a limited understanding, to be sure, yet perhaps nearly as much as can be attained by the average white. Beard was an angry boy and on that day in October he may have had particular cause to be. If the names Smith had been calling him were in fact racial epithets, if Hachmeister's objections to him being in the company of the unnamed girl had their basis in racism, if the manner in which Rapp had dealt with him was overly severe due to prejudice, who can blame Beard for having been angry? But in his anger, Beard caused the death of my sister, and that cannot be excused.

I do not know in actuality whether or not Beard's violent outburst on October 17, 1961, was racially precipitated. I can only speculate. I do know, however, that while William Hachmeister eventually recovered from his wounds, the Humphrey family will never fully recover from theirs.

And I also know that, although all memory of Debbie is lost to me, her death affected my personality at its deepest levels. I was raised in a post-Debbie environment, in a family with pain, anger, and fear ingrained in its consciousness. When my sister died, the family dynamics—emotions, attitudes, behaviors—were radically and irreparably altered in our household, and it was that altered household in which I grew up.

Who would I have been if Debbie had not been killed? If the shooting had never happened? If she were still alive today, teaching school somewhere? Perhaps even if she'd never been born, so that my family would not have known the pain of her death? Would I have
been a less angry person than I am now? Would I have had a steadier temper and been less susceptible to annoyance? Would I have been more forgiving and less judgmental? I have learned from my father's inveterate anger to be angry myself. Irritation and impatience come easily to me. I fly into a rage at small things even while concurrently recognizing their smallness. I am intolerant of the foibles of others, and am often too ready and willing to hang the label of fool on a fellow mortal. I am cynical, to the point that a close friend of mine once told me I was the most cynical person he'd ever known. I am not here laying blame on my father for my personality flaws. I am merely examining the evolution of some aspects of my personhood. Anger, of course, is not the totality of my being. It simply occupies a larger fraction of my character than it does in most people. I have also acquired positive attributes from my father—a love of the outdoors, a concern for the needy, a relentless demand for justice—but anger is a part of me as anger is a part of him. A part too large for either our good or the good of those around us.

If Debbie had not died, would I have been religious? Would her faith have inspired me to faith? Would my family's religious beliefs, undamaged by tragedy, have engendered similar beliefs within me? I have tried to believe in God, yet I have never managed to succeed. There are those who say they know there is a God and those who say they know there is not a God. I know neither of these things. I am an agnostic of nearly 20 years standing. Where will my spirit go when I die? Being an agnostic, I can't venture to say. I do worry about it sometimes, however. I wonder if there is a hell and if that will be my eventual, everlasting dwelling place. The Baptists who knocked on my
door a few nights ago certainly thought so. They must have been going from house to house—a pair of sincere, clean-cut young men, so like the two Mormons from years before—trying to lead a few more souls to God. One of them asked me if I had given much thought to where I would be spending eternity. They received a polite, noncommittal answer and soon were traveling on up the street, to the next house. The incident raised in me a curiosity as to how much success is met with by convert-seekers going from door to door, visiting the homes of strangers. Judging by the nearly universal annoyance of everyone I have ever known who has had such persons knock on their doors, I would say not a great deal. Yet I suspect that most canvassing Christians would hold forth that if even only one soul were saved through such means, then all the collective millions of man-hours of effort would have been worth it. And maybe they're right. However, I was not that one soul that particular evening, and I continue in my secular ways. Again, I do not blame anyone for my failure to find belief. The state of my spirituality is no one's responsibility save my own. Still, I cannot help but wonder if religion would have been easier to come by if I had been brought up in an atmosphere of faith rather than one of ambivalence.

If Debbie had not died, would I have had a less grim view of life? Would my fear of loss have been less intense? Would my happiness in loving the man in my life have been less tinged by fear? A press conference was held by Morey Junior High School's student council on October 19, 1961, and was reported in the Post the following day. At this conference, council member Dan Eitemiller, age 14, asserted that Morey students had "learned from" the shooting incident. There was little doubt, he assured the press, that all school rules would be rigidly
enforced. As quoted in the *Post*, he stated, "I don't think another word will have to be said about following rules here." He confidently claimed that "Something like this won't happen again." Yet hadn't murder been against the rules prior to the shooting? Such naive trust in the words of law to keep one safe. Chuck Fleischer, student body secretary, also age 14, commented at the press conference that "Many people believe Morey is a place where it's not safe to walk the halls; where you could get shot any moment. This is not true." Yet of course it's true. It's true anywhere. There is no inoculation against criminal violence. No one is protected from it. Not Dan Eitemiller. Not Chuck Fleischer. Not me. Not the people I love. Debbie's death was not a singular occurrence. Death can find anyone, anywhere, anytime. And it needn't come only as a result of violence. Accident, disease, and physical malfunction also collect their toll. No one is ever safe, and knowing this has made me afraid to love. I assume that my fear of loss has gathered some of its terrible power through my having lost a loved one once before. It is a normal fear, abnormally magnified. I once considered ending my relationship with the man I later married, and who is my husband still, because the fear of loss is so powerful within me. I considered canceling our wedding plans and living my life alone. I could not feel the love without the fear—the two emotions moved in tandem, inextricably hand in hand--and I pondered if I might not be better off minus both. It has often been said that life is a gamble, and it's true. Most of us win most of the time, but you never know when you might lose. Even so, after some thought, I decided I couldn't hide in a safe corner somewhere. The claustrophobia wouldn't have been worth it. There was only so much I could do to protect myself from pain and still have a meaningful
existence. I passed up the safety of a solitary cocoon and chose love in spite of its constant companion. And now I live every day with the fear of the loss of my husband, and I wonder what will happen to me, emotionally, should something ever happen to him.

For most of my life, I considered Debbie's death as having little relevance for me in the here and now, being simply an occurrence caught in the past, an intriguing and tragic bit of family history. I had not thought of it as a lasting, shaping force, still powerful in our family today. I see now how mistaken I was. So much of who I am and what I am can be traced to my sister and to her death those many years ago. Her life, to me, was like an image glimpsed on the surface of a pond just before someone tossed a pebble into the water, disintegrating the image and leaving me with only the ripples to examine. Although the image is long since gone, the ripples yet remain, flowing within each member of the Humphrey family. I can see those ripples in my parents' distrust of life, in how my brothers relate to their children, and in a multitude of aspects of myself.

One thing I cannot see, however, try as I might to reconstruct it in my mind, is that image from the past. It is an image of Debbie playing teacher with the neighborhood children, eating dinner with her family, reading her Bible, winding rollers into her freshly washed hair. It is an image once viewed, but which I cannot now remember. The only way I can see a true image of Debbie, instead of the dimly beheld, unclear figure I have built in my imagination, is to recall the school photograph of her, the photograph sitting on a lace doily in my parents' living room. For me, Debbie is essentially a still, rather than a moving picture.
She is both 14 years old and 43 years old, yet I know neither the
girl she was nor the woman she would have become. I now feel Debbie's
death as a loss to me, which is something I had not felt before. I have
crossed the threshold of my family's pain, and am no longer on the
outside. Although it is unknown to them, I have been able to join my
family in their bereavement, and that, at least, is a gain.

Deborah Faith Humphrey
August 6, 1947 - October 17, 1961
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