

EXPIATION is the second novel written by Greg Messel

You may be interested in reading the first novel “Sunbreaks”

“Sunbreaks” was published in September of 2009. It is the story of a middle-aged man who is suddenly alone after losing his wife in a tragic car accident. He wonders if he will ever break out of the gloominess of his life and then he meets a dazzling young woman named Erika. She brings him back to life and his mundane, sad life is transformed by the warmth of her love. This unlikely pair struggles with the challenges of life in a story that is both poignant and humorous. “Sunbreaks” uses Portland, Oregon as a location for the story.

To find out more about “Sunbreaks” and the author look on the web at <http://sunbreaksthebook.wordpress.com/>

Follow the links on this blog to meet and discuss books with the author on Twitter, Facebook, Goodreads and MySpace

“Sunbreaks” and “Expiation” are available at Amazon.Com, BarnesandNoble.Com, Trafford.Com and other book buying web sites and fine bookstores.

*Dedicated To My
High School Sweetheart*

EXPIATION

BY GREG MESSEL

EXPIATION

ex·pi·a·tion [*ek-spee-ey-shuh n*]

1. Definition: [noun] compensation for a wrong; to make amends or reparation for (wrongdoing or guilt); atone for; satisfaction
2. To pay the penalty of: suffer for; the act of atoning for sin or wrongdoing

Synonyms: [atonement](#), [propitiation](#)

Related Words: [reparation](#), [amends](#)

www.dictionary.com/ says "the means by which atonement or reparation is made."

CHAPTER ONE

A SURPRISE VISITOR

Monday, November 29, 1999

"Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending" – Maria Robinson

My sudden and unexpected return to Seattle was about to trigger a chain of events which would completely change my life. Three months from this date my career, my life in San Francisco with my daughter and everything I had known before would be radically altered.

Everyone was feeling the pressure of the uncertainty which surrounded the dawning of a new century, which would occur in just about a month. Fear had been spreading around the globe for months in anticipation of the calendar flipping over to 2000. As the final month of the 20th Century came, fear was so rampant that you could sense it and taste it. The fear was so real that it was being sold as a commodity in various forms.

However, not all change is to be feared. Change makes us uncomfortable. The wave of turmoil about to overtake my life would ultimately result in me becoming happier than I had been for years. Abrupt and profound events were about to occur.

The week had begun routinely. I was finishing my work day at the newspaper where I was a reporter. I was looking forward to a quiet Thanksgiving with my daughter, her boyfriend and the parents of my late wife. My twenty-two year old daughter was taking charge this year and was going to prepare the family meal.

I was putting the finishing touches on a story I was writing about a pending garbage strike which could hit San Francisco just before the holidays. I had 15 minutes until deadline, when my phone rang. It was my daughter. She had just received a call from Seattle informing her that my mother was found dead in her home about three hours ago. My mother's death had been completely unexpected despite her advancing years.

An anticipated joyous gathering for Thanksgiving was overshadowed by the sudden passing of my mother. Much of the day was spent communicating with my brother and sister and making travel arrangements.

I also contacted my employer to inform them of the family emergency. My early estimate was that I might be in Seattle for a couple of weeks. My editor expressed his condolences and then reminded me that I had not taken a day off for a very long time. My workaholic habits had become a topic at the newspaper with my boss for some time. He kept urging me to use some of my allocated days off to recharge my batteries. I was teased by my editor that San Francisco and the newspaper could actually function without me there.

San Francisco was renowned for its resiliency and had bounced back from many catastrophic events. My newspaper—the San Francisco Chronicle—had been operating for over a hundred years. I was assured that both the city and the newspaper had somehow found ways to cope in the past without me. My editor didn't want to use this time of bereavement as a chance to ping on me about taking some time off. I'm sure he was showing restraint when after informing him of my mother's death, I said I would need to take a couple of weeks off.

“Take all of the time you need,” my editor replied.

I flew to Seattle to meet my brother and sister on Friday. We made funeral arrangements and began the process of putting my mother’s affairs in order. My sister was already in Seattle on Thanksgiving when I talked with her. She was getting several things in motion and we jointly decided to have the funeral on Monday after the Thanksgiving weekend. My sister contacted the Seattle newspapers with obituary information and the time and location of the funeral, so my mother’s passing would get the attention it deserved.

I flew out of San Francisco on the busy Friday morning after Thanksgiving. I didn’t know that it would be much longer than a few weeks before I returned to my beloved city. I also did not realize that when the plane’s wheels lifted off of the runway in San Francisco that events were now set in motion which would change my life forever.

The change would be the stuff of which dreams are made.

On Monday, as we entered the church, the congregation arose out of respect for my mother. I walked with my brother and sister as my mother’s casket was rolled slowly down the middle aisle of the church.

It had been a gray, rainy Monday in Seattle and the sky was like a thick layer of gray cotton balls. There had been a dense overcast all day with no hint that the sun could ever penetrate the heavy blanket of clouds. The church was full of many of those people who had shared parts of my mother’s journey through life. She had spent most of her days in the Seattle area since her entry into the world in 1916.

It was just after my mother’s birth in January of 1916, that Seattle was hit with the Great Storm of 1916. It began to snow in Seattle in late January of that year. Before it was over on February 2, there were more than 21 inches of snow. It still stands as the largest snowfall ever in a city which rarely gets snow. I’ve seen old sepia toned pictures of piles of snow on Yesler Way downtown. Trolleys were stranded by huge piles of wet snow and there was no way of removing it. A large snowman blocked the sidewalk on Third Ave. and the dome of St. James Cathedral collapsed. There are pictures of turn-of-the-century-looking men in bowler hats looking perplexed at the huge piles of snow, perhaps wondering why God made the rain freeze and behave it such a strange way.

There were many intersecting lines between her life and the collective experience of those who populated the pews. My mother’s mortality had lasted just over 83 years. My mother entered the world in the middle of the “great war”, the war to end all wars supposedly, as American troops headed to Europe to fight the aggressors.

She was about two years old when the influenza epidemic hit the nation just as they celebrated victory, with masks over their noses and mouths to prevent the spread of the deadly plague. Mom was a teenager during the Great Depression and a young woman just as the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor as Hitler marched across Europe.

My father, who died five years ago, had survived the Pearl Harbor attack on one of the ships while regularly writing letters to my mother. He continued to fight in the South Pacific through the rest of the war. Dad finally reunited with my mother in Seattle where they were married in 1947. It was an incredible chunk of history which ran concurrently with my mother’s life. She witnessed firsthand most of the major events of the 20th Century but she succumbed just weeks before the dawn of the new century.

Her three children, who now walked silently behind her, had hoped her journey would last a little longer but the end came suddenly and peacefully. My mother had a good life and, as far as I’m aware, enriched the lives of others she encountered. My brother Raymond was born in

1948 and my sister, Diane, came two years later. Finally there was me, who entered the family last-- just two years after Diane.

The last time I talked with my mother we had made plans to get together at Christmas time in Seattle. My daughter Vicki had the holiday break approaching and was planning to come with me. Vicki is a beautiful blend of her Japanese mother and my gene pool. She was about five foot five, had thick black hair and large brown eyes like her mother. I'm proud of her as she finishes her senior year at the University of San Francisco. I only have one child, but this one is a thoroughbred. I appear to have gotten quality in place of quantity in the offspring department.

Vicki and I are now in Seattle to be with my mother, but not in the way we envisioned. The world will be an emptier and colder place without my mother. I knew she was getting older but I actually thought she would be around for several more years.

I walked slowly and tried to appear appropriately serious for this occasion, mostly looking at the back of my mother's coffin. I was aware that as part of the trio walking behind her, we were the focal point of the crowded church. We were to accompany my mother's final entry into the church to the front of the chapel where we would take our place on the front row. About halfway down the long aisle, something made me glance up. Then I saw Katie.

Could it be, after all of these years?

I'm sure my solemn, sad mask slipped as I registered complete astonishment. It had to be Katie! I briefly broke ranks and gave her a quick hug, saying, "Wait for me afterwards." I sure hoped that was Katie or else I had just picked up a woman, who was a total stranger, at my mother's funeral.

She looked so good and I couldn't resist stealing glances at her all through the funeral service. My brother and sister gave me a couple of inquisitive glances which sent the message, "what are you doing?" I kept swiveling to the right to check her out. She caught me looking a few times and gave me a small smile.

I was now feeling guilty that my own mother's funeral had become background noise to my thoughts as I remembered my time with Katie in the magical years of youth. I also pondered all of the years without her. I've spent many years wondering where she was.

I hadn't seen Katie for almost 30 years. Yet I had seen her...in my mind in the often-remembered golden days so long ago when we were "the couple." We were the couple that in everyone's estimation would be together forever.

In our high school years, Katie and I dwelt in a privileged existence. We had everything at our disposal as the royalty of our popularity-fueled high school world. We were mostly oblivious to our status and thought it was just the way the world was structured. Then it all came apart after high school graduation and the intrusion of the harsh, real world.

What was her married name now? She didn't go by her maiden name Katie Broussard. I know she didn't.

There had been many late, lonely nights when my stray thoughts would turn to her for some reason. I wondered where she was now. Is she still in the Seattle area? Is she still married? Is she happy? Does she have kids? Is she still alive? If she is still alive and any of these other things...would she like to see me? Does she still harbor resentment towards me because of my insensitivity to her feelings so many years ago? How could I've so carelessly tossed away a jewel such as her?

Over the years when I would return to Seattle, I wondered if I would see her again. I secretly looked for Katie in crowded places and sometimes would even see a woman with blonde

hair that I thought might be her. When I returned to the old neighborhood, I sometimes imagined what it would be like if I did see her again.

I had searched on our high school reunion web site for her name and launched internet searches sometimes late at night when I was feeling lonely or melancholy. In all of the vast power of the internet, “my” Katie was MIA. She was flying below the radar of the electronic surveillance we were all under as the 21st Century neared. I launched these electronic reconnaissance missions sometimes even when my wife, Wendy, was still living.

There were never any signs of Katie. However, Katie was always with me. I fantasized about what my alternative life would have been like if I had been true to Katie. What if I had come back from San Francisco to get her, like I promised I would? She was the one that got away...or more accurately the one I sent away. I went to our ten-year reunion hoping Katie would be there. There was no Katie. Some of our old friends thought she would come. They had lost track of Katie but they said she still lived in Seattle. A few people I met at the reunion said that they last they had heard she was married to a doctor.

I didn't go to the 20-year reunion because it was held during the last weeks of Wendy's life and our home had been damaged by a severe earthquake. We were all robbed of seeing our beautiful, golden Katie, one of the most popular girls in our high school.

I remember those faded memories of Katie the cheerleader; Katie the homecoming queen and Katie, my anointed girlfriend for life. It was because Katie loved me that many people thought I was blessed with abundance of all things a teenage boy values. Many guys were jealous that Katie loved me. Many girls, who in my hormonal turbo-charged 17-year old mind, might have been interested in me—were not, because they knew I belonged to Katie.

Now at the most unlikely of times, Katie reappears in my life--at my mother's funeral. She is barely over five feet tall. She weighed less than 90 pounds in high school. Katie now, over 30 years later, looks only 10-15 pounds heavier. I very much approve of the strategic location where those extra pounds decided to land.

Geez, I'm such a pervert and such a scum. I'm sitting at my mother's funeral thinking about how Katie's breasts and hips have filled out in such a delightful way. She came appropriately dressed in a sleek black dress and black nylons. Katie looks great in black.

What kind of person has these thoughts while their dead mother lies before them being eulogized as a wonderful person? I haven't heard most of what has been said. I wonder how much privacy we have from those spirits on the other side. Does my mother, now part of the great hereafter, know that I'm spending her funeral thinking about the cup size of my long lost love? If she could, would mom cuff me alongside the head and say, “Pay attention!”

I'm picking up a woman at my mother's funeral because I think she looks hot in black.

Actually it is much, much more. Katie is my long-lost love. I had wondered if I would ever see her again. The way she looks now is beyond my most optimistic fantasy about how middle-age would descend on Katie. Her blonde hair is still blonde, but shorter, trimmed just below her jaw line. The Katie of my youth always had long blonde hair, which bounced freely in the carefree days of our love. Sometimes she had her hair pulled back in a ponytail which, because of her diminutive size, made her look about 13 years old when we were seniors in high school.

Her face was still beautiful, and her sparkling green eyes still looked the same as when I'd stared into them on Friday night dates or at the beach. There were more lines on her face but she actually looked better than ever. Speaking of lines on your face...is Katie sitting back there taking the same physical inventory of me that I'm taking of her?

Is she thinking, “Wow, what happened?” Is she thinking, “Someone has really had a hard life...or maybe he was in some kind of deforming car accident or fire.” I hope I look anything close to as good as she looks. Do I look fat to her? Is she thinking—“I wonder what he has been doing for the past thirty years? Apparently eating!”

I was just over six feet tall and weighed about 170 pounds last time Katie saw me. I no longer weighed 170, but more like 200. My sandy-colored hair was now starting to be speckled with signs of gray.

I need to snap out of it and get back into my mother’s funeral. I wonder why Katie came. Was it to see me? Or am I delusional and she was closer to my mother than I realized? Why did Katie choose this moment to reappear after all of these years? Does this mean she is still interested in me? Could it be? She appeared glad to see me. Who is that guy sitting by her? Is that her husband? Oh, no, I bet it is her husband. Maybe he came to kick my butt because of the way I treated his sweet wife.

Wait, what kind of guy comes to a funeral to beat up his wife’s former boyfriend? Oh, no. I suddenly bent over with both hands covering my face. I then realized that the congregation must have thought I was suddenly overwhelmed with grief.

How could I be doing this to my sweet mother? When I removed my hands from my face, Diane gave me a sympathetic glance and wiped tears from her eyes with a Kleenex. Raymond leaned around Diane and frowned at me as if to say, “What the hell are you doing?”

I tried to put my funeral-face back on and get into the event at hand. Suddenly, as I pulled myself back into the moment and tried to forget about Katie for a minute, I heard “amen and amen” then organ music began. It was over. I don’t remember a single thing about my own mother’s funeral because I was obsessing about Katie. I’m so confused by the sudden unexpected intersection of two divergent events—my mother’s funeral and the startling reappearance of my long lost Katie.

I felt sadness and extreme excitement all at once, which was short circuiting my ability to think rationally. Amid my complete disorientation I heard the clergyman say, “Will the congregation please rise.” Whoa, it’s time to leave. I had to find some way to secure Katie so she wouldn’t suddenly disappear from the funeral and again from my life.

We began the slow march down the aisle to accompany my mother out of the church, to the hearse and then to her final resting place. If my mother is looking on these proceedings she must be rolling her eyes and shaking her head. She must be thinking, “Couldn’t my Daniel give one hour to listen to my funeral? He didn’t seem very sad that I’m gone.”

“Diane and Raymond behaved with dignity but of course Daniel has to be the different one,” she’s telling my father as they are looking down on the final tribute.

My eyes met Katie’s as I proceeded out of the church. As I walked by her I extended my hand and said, “Come with me.” She took my hand and complied. The trio was now a foursome accompanying my mother’s body out of the church. My brother and sister shot me puzzled glances and nodded to Katie. She smiled an uncomfortable smile and tried to not be noticed by the large crowd in the church. I held on to Katie’s hand as we descended the church steps behind the six pallbearers who now lifted the coffin off the wheeled cart. It has been a long time since I’ve held Katie’s hand. She’s letting me do it. I turned and whispered, “Can you come to the cemetery with me?” She discreetly nodded.

How uncomfortable is this moment? I’m asking a woman, “Could you go with me to bury my mother and then we can go do something, okay? Get some coffee, grab something to eat.” This is not at all how I pictured finding Katie again. It’s not how I pictured behaving at

my mother's funeral either. I panicked. I wasn't much of a church-goer but I am sure there were nice things said about my wonderful mother at her funeral. Too bad I was obsessing about the return of Katie and how I must find a way to not let her out of my sight again--maybe never again.

She followed me to the waiting limousine which would transport the family to the cemetery. Raymond, Diane, Katie and I were in the front limo. Their spouses and my mother's grandchildren followed in the second long, steel-gray limo. Raymond and Diane were trying to be polite and not cause a scene as they sat in the seat facing Katie and me. All I could think of to say was "You both remember Katie don't you?"

They looked a bit confused by what was occurring and Diane said, "Oh, yes, hi Katie, nice to see you again." Raymond just nodded with an expression on his face which made me think he had just taken a swig of soured milk.

Katie said, "I'm very sorry about your mother. She was a wonderful woman."

They thanked her for her sensitive expression and continued to shoot puzzled glances at me. I wanted to immediately grab Katie and tell her how glad I was to see her. That was impossible under these bizarre circumstances.

I whispered to her, "thanks for coming with me. I'm sorry to put you on the spot but I wanted to see you and talk to you. It's so good to see you."

She smiled while casting her green eyes towards my siblings and said simply, "It's so good to see you too and I'm very sorry about your loss."

We rode in silence. Then I broke the awkward moment saying "It was a beautiful service, a real tribute to our mother."

Diane agreed and said, "It was beautiful. Mother would have been pleased. She touched so many people apparently."

Raymond nodded and said, "It was nice" even though he continued to glare at me.

I wondered, did I really behave that badly at the funeral? Was it that obvious? Is Raymond upset with me or does he just always look kind of grumpy? I haven't been around him much over the last few years since he moved to Texas.

"Hopefully, we can finish at the cemetery before it starts to rain again," I said continuing to make funeral small talk. Everyone nodded but said nothing. I looked at Katie and smiled. She returned the smile. I couldn't believe I was sitting here next to Katie. I also noticed that Katie was not wearing a wedding ring. I think her eyes followed my eyes down to her finger and back up until they met. Here I am with my long lost love, my long lost friend, reunited after 30 years and we have to ride in silence to the cemetery.

As we exited the car, I reached for her hand but she didn't grab my hand. I whispered, "Sorry to do this to you. I just wanted to see you. Can you stay with me until we can talk? Am I imposing?"

"You're not imposing and yes, I can stay with you," she said with a smile. We then walked to my mother's open grave. Vicki caught sight of Katie and me walking together to the grave and looked very interested in this new development. I'd make sure they meet one another after the graveside service. I was trying to be restrained and concentrate on the major milestone occurring in front of me. Now that I had Katie secured by my side, my thoughts turned to the unexpected departure of my mother.

I've heard that those who have watched a loved one die slowly say that sudden death is preferable. I've experienced both. My mother and father were here one moment and gone the next. There's something very disturbing about dying in the twinkling of an eye.

Then there was my wife, Wendy. I watched the life slowly leave Wendy over a prolonged period. It was extremely painful to observe. "Observe" is what it felt like because I couldn't do anything to stop her decline. We tried everything. Sometimes we were hopeful. There were times when we thought Wendy was winning the fight, but ultimately she lost.

It's difficult to pick which way you would like to go. I guess it's a good thing we don't decide. My feelings about departing this life are summed up by the famous Woody Allen line, "It's not that I'm afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens."

After the final prayer was said, it was time to go. I continued to be unstrung by the complete emotional schizophrenia I was experiencing as I simultaneously said goodbye to my mother and reconnected with Katie.

Several old friends and family members now pressed forward to offer condolences to me and my siblings. One person who I had not seen for many, many years said as they departed, "It's nice to see you and Katie again." This person apparently assumed that Katie and I had never been apart.

When the crowd thinned a bit, I had the opportunity to introduce Katie to Vicki.

"Vicki, this is my dear friend, Katie and Katie this is my daughter, Vicki," I said.

Vicki's face immediately brightened as she said, "Is this Katie, your high school girlfriend?"

That's not the way I would have put it but I replied, "Yes, this is that Katie."

"It's so good to finally meet you," Vicki said, "I've heard so much about you and seen lots of pictures of you."

"It's very nice to meet you also Vicki," Katie said, "I've changed a bit since high school...probably quite a bit since those pictures were taken...but I'm Katie."

"So it's been a while since you two have seen each other huh?" Vicki pressed on.

"Yeah, quite a while," I said. "It was a wonderful surprise today even though I wished we could have met in more pleasant circumstances."

"Me too," Katie said addressing Vicki, "but it's wonderful to see your dad again. I noticed the article in the Seattle Times about your grandmother's passing. I'm so sorry for your loss. I thought it was the best opportunity I'd have to see your Dad for many, many years."

"I'm very glad that you *did* come Katie," I said, "Can we spend a little time together today before you go? We could ride back to the funeral home and then pick up your car and you could give me a ride home. Does that work for you? I don't mean to latch onto you and hold you captive, but I guess that's what I'm doing."

Katie smiled and said, "I was hoping to get some time with you to catch up a little before you left town, so I'm a willing captive."

"Great," I said, "let's ride back together. Join us Vicki." Then I added, "Vicki, when we get back to the funeral home can you catch a ride back to the condo with the family? I'll go with Katie so we have a chance to talk for a while."

"Sure Dad," Vicki said.

As I rode back to get Katie's car at the mortuary, it occurred to me that it was very difficult to make small-talk with someone you haven't seen for 30 years. Where do we begin? I have no idea what had happened in Katie's life and she has no inkling of what transpired in my life. We talked about Vicki instead.

"So, you're in college now Vicki?" Katie asked.

"Yes, at USF and I have just one more semester," Vicki replied.

"Good for you," Katie said, "What are your plans?"

Vicki said, "I'm finishing up an Engineering degree and plan to get a job in Mechanical Engineering. I'm interviewing with several firms in the Bay Area."

"Wow, that's great," Katie said, "congratulations. Good luck."

"Imagine, I have a daughter who is an engineer, how did that happen?" I said.

"Yeah, Dad can't even figure out how to screw in a light bulb," Vicki joked, "I guess I got those engineering genes from my mother."

"Don't feel like you have to hold back in front of Katie," I said sarcastically, "just tell us how you really feel."

Katie and Vicki laughed. We were now pulling into the parking lot at the mortuary to retrieve our cars.

As we departed the limousine, I said to Vicki, "I'll see you back at Grandma's condo soon, okay sweetie?"

"Okay, Dad, see you soon. It's so great to finally meet you Katie."

Katie smiled and said, "Good to meet you as well, good luck in your exciting future Vicki."

Katie pointed the way to her silver Honda Accord. I was now finally alone with Katie. The moment I had wanted and even dreamed of happening, was now at hand. I seemed to have no idea what to do with the opportunity.

"So apparently, your Mother had a condo in..."

"Edmonds," I said. Edmonds is a quaint small maritime community just north of Seattle, right on the Puget Sound. My parents moved into a condo there just before my father's health began to fail him. It had been a great choice for them and their lifestyle. Unfortunately, it had been all too brief.

"Oh very nice," Katie said, "I've always liked it out there."

"So where are you living now?" I asked as we entered her car.

"I live in my parent's old house now," Katie said.

"In Ballard?"

"Yeah, the old neighborhood," she said. "You remember the house, right?"

"Remember it?" I said, "It was the center of my universe for a while. I think I've been in every room in that house and remember it well."

"That's our little secret that you've been in every room of that house, remember?" Katie said slyly.

I laughed and said, "Is there anyone left who would be outraged to hear our secret?"

"It's still our secret."

"You're right. We had so many good times there."

After a few moments of silence I said, "I hope you don't mind driving me to Edmonds."

"Of course not."

"How did you come to live in the Ballard house?"

"After my parents both died I ended up with the house. My one sister lives in Portland and the other lives in southern California, so the house was available to me. I've always loved that neighborhood. It's changed and is now becoming a cool, chic neighborhood in Seattle."

As Katie explained these developments to me, I couldn't resist taking a good long look at her as she drove me to my mother's house. Katie, the object of desire for most of the guys in our high school, was now an even more beautiful woman to me. The mature Katie is more wonderful than I'd ever imagined. She still has a trim, petite body and her beautiful legs. Her face shows some signs of aging but she is stunning. I couldn't stop looking at her face.

“I guess I wouldn’t recognize the place or the people anymore,” I said referring to the old neighborhood in Ballard.

Katie replied, “Actually you probably would recognize the physical part of the neighborhood. The people...well that deck has been shuffled by deaths and the transitory nature of people now. I think there are several people like me—a different generation of the same family who now owns the old homestead.”

“Wow, we have so much catching up to do...that I would like to do Katie,” I said.

“How long are you going to be in town?” she asked as we pulled off the interstate onto the Edmonds exit. This meant I had about ten minutes left with Katie.

“I’m actually going to be here for awhile. It looks like it’s falling to me to deal with my parents’ affairs. My brother, who can’t get away from his job, has to go back to Texas. My sister is out in Yakima. She has kind of a complicated life. Diane has three teenagers, an aging mother-in-law living with her, and they’ve had a lot of financial problems. To make a long story short—her husband seems to always have a great idea about how to make a lot of money. But my brother-in-law seems to have a real talent for losing large amounts of money. So anyway, I guess, I’m the one who gets to clean up the mess at my parents’ houses now.”

“What about your job?” Katie asked. “You’re still in the newspaper business at the Examiner in San Francisco, right?”

“I’m actually with the San Francisco Chronicle now. I switched over from the Examiner almost ten years ago or so. Unfortunately, I’ve turned into such a workaholic over the last few years that I’ve a lot of leave built up,” I said, “Now seems like a good time to take it.”

“Really?” she said.

“Yeah, I was contemplating a trip to Europe or some sabbatical type of thing to recharge my batteries. I think I’m too much of a news junkie to leave,” I said. “When I left, my editor assured me that San Francisco will continue to function and so will the Chronicle without me there.”

“That was nice of him,” Katie joked.

“Wow, there’s so much I want to talk to you about,” I said. I had directed Katie to turn left onto Bell Street and to the curb near my mother’s condo, just a couple of blocks off of the beach of Puget Sound.

“This is so charming,” she said as she surveyed the neighborhood.

“So, since I’m going to be here for at least the next few weeks...actually I may be here for the rest of the year... do you have some time to spend with an old friend who’d love to spend some time with you?” I asked.

“I do,” Katie said, “I’d love to be with you and catch up on our lives. Obviously, I was interested in seeing you...since I came to the funeral—with all due respect to your mother.”

I smiled at the realization that Katie had taken the initiative to break the long string of silent years between the two of us.

“What are you doing tomorrow or tomorrow night? I guess I don’t even know what you’re doing job-wise.”

Katie said, “I work in downtown Seattle, but right now is not a good time to meet downtown. There’s the World Trade Organization conference thing going on downtown this week. There’s all kinds of protests and lots of chaos around the convention center. I work very near the convention center, so it will be a nightmare to get in and out of downtown this week...even more of a nightmare than usual.”

“Oh, that’s right. That’s going to be interesting.”

“You’re not going to grab your notebook and go down there to start interviewing protesters are you?”

“No,” I said, “but that was my first instinct.”

Katie laughed. “How about if we meet at that cool Italian restaurant on Market Street in Ballard for dinner-- if that works for you?”

“Sure, you name the time and place since you’re working tomorrow.”

“Remember Lombardi’s?”

“I don’t think so. Where is it?”

“Maybe Lombardi’s was after your time. I love the food and the atmosphere. It’s on the main street—Market—right in the middle of downtown Ballard. How about 6 o’clock or so and we can spend the evening together?”

“I can’t believe this is happening. I’d love to, Katie.”

She smiled and put her arms around me. I embraced her for a moment. It felt so good to hold her again, even briefly.

“Katie,” I said, “thanks so much for coming today. I didn’t know how to find you.”

“But I found you,” she replied. “I didn’t know what it would be like but I couldn’t resist the chance to see you again.”

“Thank you for that. I’ve spent the whole day being sad about my mother and so excited about seeing you—simultaneously. I usually don’t act this weird.”

“See you at Lombardi’s,” she said with a smile.

CHAPTER TWO

GLORY DAYS

October 25, 1968

No, there's nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream --. Thomas Moore

I had just a little over one minute to try to salvage a victory for Ballard High School in the football game with Garfield on this misty October Friday night. It had rained lightly most of the day but had stopped just before game time. However, as the fourth quarter wound down a light mist was starting to fall again. We were not going to be out in the weather much longer because there were only 46 seconds left in the game.

We trailed Garfield High School by four, 17-13. The four-point differential was a big problem. We needed a touchdown not a field goal. This situation occurred because we had botched an attempted point-after following our second touchdown early in the third quarter.

Both of these schools had been in Seattle forever. Ballard dated back to 1901 and Garfield opened its doors in 1920. Garfield had produced two musical legends—Jimi Hendrix and Quincy Jones. About two years from tonight's football game, the bright light which had been Jimi Hendrix would be extinguished through premature death. But before that, he still had legendary performances at Woodstock and the Isle of Wight Festival ahead of him.

The only music we would hear for the next couple of minutes would be from the high school bands whose sound would be largely swallowed up by the din of the screaming, roaring crowd. They sensed the moment of truth was here. I'd try one more running play and then call a timeout.

The turf on the field was soft which had caused numerous problems for us tonight. Maybe we would get lucky and a large hole would open up in the line allowing our halfback Dave Morris to race for the goal line. After the snap I turned and put the football into Dave's red jersey just below his number 25 as he bolted for the line of scrimmage. There wasn't much room there and he could only get a few yards before he disappeared into a swarm of purple and white jerseys. Dave managed to get just across the 20-yard line and I waited for the referees to spot the ball down. I quickly called timeout and headed for the sideline.

As I walked over to confer with the coaches about how they wanted me to spend the next 30 seconds, I saw Katie and the other cheerleaders waving their pom poms and encouraging the already frenzied crowd. I could always spot Katie with her long blonde hair bouncing and flying in the air. Just a few more minutes and I'd be with her. However, I had to focus on the critical task at hand.

The coach wanted me to try one more pass play, but he emphasized that if all of my receivers were covered then he wanted me to throw the ball out of bounds to stop the clock. That would give us enough time to take one more crack at the end zone. We ought to get two more passing plays, maybe three, if we managed the clock prudently. The designed play had me roll to the right to look for a receiver. My sleek wide receiver, my favorite target, Brian Johansen, would run the right sideline and then hook left towards the end zone. If he was open I would hit

him with the pass and we would win. As a safety valve, Dave, would run out of the backfield on a shorter route and be there as a secondary choice for my pass.

The crowd roared as I came up behind the center calling signals. About five Garfield players would be covering my receivers. The other six would come charging and try to kill me before I got a pass off. I got the snap and rolled to the right. I looked for Brian and tried to patiently wait for him to get open. Meanwhile there was a thundering herd of Garfield pass rushers pursuing me. Brian wasn't open. I didn't want to force it and have the ball intercepted. That would be the worst possible outcome.

I looked for my secondary choice, Dave, but he had slipped as he cut to the left and had fallen down on the turf. I had just seconds to decide what to do but my gut instinct was to take one more shot. Instead of throwing the ball way over the head of the players in the end zone, which would have stopped the clock, I suddenly reversed my field and started running to the left side of the field.

The Garfield pursuers slammed on the brakes and started to chase me to the more open left side of the field. Amid the roar of the crowd, I heard the coaches yelling for me to dump the ball. I continued to run laterally behind the line of scrimmage to see if there was any hope on the left side. I needed to decide in about two seconds so I would not use the entire remaining clock.

Suddenly I saw him. Brian had shaken off the defenders and was now a couple of steps ahead of the nearest Bulldog player. I was running for my life from the fierce pass rush and then I released the ball towards Brian, hoping to lead him perfectly as he raced across the end zone. Just as the ball left my finger tips I felt a crushing impact below my shoulder blades as I was blindsided by a Garfield lineman.

Brian suddenly disappeared from my view and all I could see was the muddy grass as I was hammered to the turf. My face guard plowed a trench in the field as I landed face down. I was stunned as if suddenly struck down by an oncoming truck. I lay motionless for what seemed like minutes, but actually for a few seconds, trying to recover from the hit. The crowd was roaring wildly. I didn't know if they were cheering a Garfield interception or a Ballard touchdown. I painfully managed to roll over, saw the dark sky above and felt raindrops hitting my face.

In front of the ink-colored sky I suddenly saw my teammate's faces smiling and yelling in wild celebration. Hands were extended to help me to my feet. Ouch. It felt like someone had attacked me from behind by striking me in the middle of my back with a sledgehammer.

As I struggled to my feet I saw Brian leaping up and down, still holding the football, then embracing me and patting me roughly on the back. As my head cleared, I looked at the scoreboard. There was no time remaining--the game was over. I was told that penalty flags flew in the air when I was hit and officials called a "roughing the quarterback" penalty against Garfield. It was small comfort. It's like being shot with a handgun which was not properly registered.

Since Brian had the ball and everyone was cheering, my final pass must have got to him. We won 19-17 and I had thrown the winning touchdown pass at the last possible second. As I made my way gingerly towards the sidelines, everyone was enthusiastically patting me on the back where a Garfield helmet had embedded itself moments ago. I was beginning to get happy, realizing my moment of triumph but I was still dazed and confused.

I scooped chunks of grass and mud out of the front of my helmet. My neck was starting to hurt as well--the result of my violent face-plant into the turf. I delicately pulled off my helmet hoping that my head remained with the rest of my body as I did so. Then I saw my beautiful

girlfriend. Katie came bounding up in her black and red cheerleader's sweater and the perfectly white, short pleated skirt. She was radiant and beautiful. Her blonde hair was restrained by a bright red hair band which, of course, perfectly matched the red in her uniform. Katie threw her arms around my neck and gave me a big kiss.

"You're the hero, baby!" she said. "Are you okay?"

"I'm still trying to decide that...I think I'm alright...but I'm glad to see you, beautiful girl."

"I was watching the ball fly through the air towards Brian and I watched him catch the winning touchdown," Katie summarized, "Then I looked back and saw you lying face down and not moving. I didn't know what happened to you."

"I got hit just as I threw the pass and I'm still recovering from having my bell rung," I said.

Katie took her hand and smoothed down my sandy-colored hair atop my muddy and sweaty face. "Well, I'll take good care of you tonight," she said tenderly.

"That makes me feel better already," I said.

We departed the field in front of the cheering crowd, holding hands and letting the noise wash over us. At that moment we were the king and queen of our world.

Little did I realize that on this magical evening, my friend at the school newspaper was snapping a photo of Katie and me, which I would secretly cherish for the next 30 years. I worked at the school newspaper where my friend Kevin was the photographer. He took pictures of the game action for next week's edition, but he saved one special photo for me which would become my private Katie-shrine. It was a picture just for me--which very few would see for many, many years.

After a Friday night football game it takes a while to inventory your body parts and find out if any are damaged or missing. There are strange welts, bumps and at times blood escaping your body from some an unknown opening. Such was the case that Friday night as I showered and prepared to spend the rest of the evening with my beautiful blonde girlfriend.

As I exited the locker room, my eyes met her green eyes which lit up when she saw me. Katie rushed forward to greet me with a kiss. Throwing the winning touchdown pass and having her waiting for me afterwards made me feel like the luckiest 17-year-old boy on earth.

We joined other assorted teammates and fellow cheerleaders at a local pizza place for the post-mortem and to celebrate the victory. Two middle-aged couples, who were leaving the pizza parlor, noticed that we were from Ballard High.

"How did you guys do?" one of the men asked.

Before anyone else could answer, Katie bubbled, "We won 19-17 thanks to this guy" as she put her hand on my shoulder. "He threw the winning touchdown pass as the clock expired," Katie boasted.

"Way to go," the man said, "you beat Garfield, right?"

"Right," I said.

"Well, congratulations," the man said as his group departed.

I was sitting with Katie to his left and another teammate to the right. My teammate leaned close to my ear and whispered, "It's so unfair that you get to be a hero and that you have her too. Save something for the rest of us."

"You can score the touchdowns and I'll keep her," I whispered. He smiled and patted me on the back. I wished everyone would stop patting me on the back since the Garfield player had

tried to ram his helmet through my spinal cord. I wasn't sure what my back looked like right then, but I felt like something bad had happened there.

After the party, Katie and I headed for her house in my 1962 Volkswagen Karman Ghia. I had worked like a slave...actually I was the slave...for a construction crew for two summers to earn enough money to get my car. I worked each summer doing all of the least desirable jobs until football two-a-day drills began in August.

I loved my orange Karman Ghia and, more importantly, my luscious girlfriend loved it too. Driving in that sporty little car with Katie was worth all of the digging in hard dirt, smashed fingers and sore muscles from my summer job. With regular gas at 29 cents a gallon, all it took was a few dollars a week for Katie and me to drive all over Seattle.

We pulled in front of her parents' house in Ballard and, as soon as I turned off the key, we passionately attacked one another. Katie then pulled back and said, "We don't have to sit out here in the cold. Mom and Dad have probably gone to bed already so we can go inside."

I agreed and then, to my disappointment, as soon as we entered the door I was greeted by both of her parents.

"How was the game?" Katie's Dad asked immediately.

Katie launched into the story line and bragged about my last-second heroics.

"Wow, you're the hero then, huh Dan?" Katie's Mom asked.

"I heaved the ball down field, the hero was my receiver Brian who got away from everyone and actually caught the ball for the touchdown," I said in the most humble presentation possible. It always played well to her parents and further convinced them what a nice young man I was...even though I planned to attack their daughter as soon as they went upstairs.

They all assured me that I'd done much more than that to win the game.

Katie's mom then said, "Well Dad and I are on our way upstairs to watch Johnny Carson so you two will have to party without us."

Katie's dad chimed in winking at me, "I'm sure you can get along without us can't you Dan?"

"We'll have to find a way," I said with a smile. With that Katie's dad laughed heartily and patted me roughly on the back saying, "Good night Dan and Katie."

Why do people keep patting me on the back?!

Her mother added, "Don't stay up too late okay kids?" She was under moral obligation to say that to her daughter as "a mommyism."

"We won't, Mom," Katie said as she kissed both of her parents good night.

Katie and I sat on the couch as her parents scurried up the stairs to get tucked into bed before Ed McMahon said, "Heeeeere's Johnny."

"So, given your mom's guidelines, we can do whatever we want on the couch right now as long as we don't stay up too late, right?" I teased.

"Yeah, you wish," Katie said. "But I think we can have some fun." She rubbed the back of my neck with her soft hands. "What's wrong?"

"My back really hurts, where I took the hit at the end of the game," I responded. "I hope it'll just be sore for a couple of days and then get better."

She reached under my shirt and began to rub my bare back.

"How does that feel?"

"Wonderful," I said, "a little lower, oh yeah, right there."

Katie pulled up my shirt and said, "Wow, your back is really red. Want me to kiss it better?"

“Yes please do,” I said.

Katie began to tenderly kiss my wounded back and gently rub it.

“Oh that feels so good Katie,” I said, “You’re so soft and wonderful.”

“You’re so hard and wonderful,” she said as she continued to rub my back and shoulders.

“While you’re at it,” I added, “I think my lips got hurt in the game also.”

“Well I can kiss those better too,” she said with a smile. “Where do they hurt?”

“Pretty much all over,” I replied.

Katie proceeded to cover every square inch of my lips, throat and surrounding area. As we kissed I rubbed her soft, beautiful legs which were fully exposed in her short cheerleader’s skirt. Finally, she pulled back and said, “we better stop...for now.”

“I still have several sore places that need to be kissed,” I protested.

“I promise I’ll continue my treatment tomorrow night,” she teased. Her face lit up with her beautiful smile as I locked-in on her twinkling emerald eyes.

I teased Katie, “What about you, you expended a lot of energy at the game tonight? Do you have any body parts that I can kiss better?”

“I’m okay, but I’ll let you know if I need your services,” she said with a shy smile.

“Have I told you lately how fantastically gorgeous you are?” I asked.

“Not for a couple of days but you can say it as often as you want,” Katie replied.

“So, what do you want to do tomorrow night?”

“Should we do a movie and then, either before or after, go to Dick’s?” Katie asked.

“Sounds perfect to me.”

Dick’s Drive-In is a Seattle icon which has been around since 1954. The simple menu has changed little over time. It features fast-food staples such as hamburgers, french fries and milkshakes. Cashiers do not accept variations on the burger's preparation, or omissions such as asking for the burger without lettuce. You can take your lady out in-style for about \$3.

“How about going to see ‘Bullitt’? It’s the new Steve McQueen movie and there will be something else playing with it. We could do the double feature.”

“Okay, see you around five tomorrow?”

“Okay,” I said leaning forward for another kiss.

We walked to the door to say goodnight. The petite Katie put her arms around my neck which made her stand on her tip toes. We kissed tenderly again and I ran my fingers through her long blonde hair.

“Good night Katie. I love you.”

“I love you too Dan. I was very proud of you tonight.”

“Katie,” I said, “I’m the luckiest guy in the world to have you.”

She kissed me again and then I was on my way down the porch steps and into the moist night air.

CHAPTER THREE

SURVIVING THE BATTLE

November 30, 1999

I may regret the way we ended, but I will never regret what we had – Unknown

Katie and I could not have picked a worse day--maybe in the history of Seattle--to meet for dinner downtown. It was extremely good fortune that Katie suggested a restaurant in Ballard and that we were not planning to meet downtown. Ballard is just over five miles northwest of the downtown core. Hopefully, Katie's bus can leave her office near 2nd Avenue, run along the Seattle waterfront and then safely head out Elliott Avenue before turning north to get Katie safely out to the Ballard neighborhood.

November 30, 1999 would become a famous date in Seattle history because today all hell broke loose just a few blocks north of Katie's office, near the Washington State Convention Center on 6th Avenue. What transpired was so severe that today's events would be summarized by the label the "Battle of Seattle." Often such labels are overblown. They come from fear mongering and too much hype from our overheated 24-7 media.

However, today *was* the "Battle of Seattle." There was violent conflict in the streets and widespread destruction of property. These aren't attributes you would ever expect from a relatively docile metropolis like Seattle.

The Geneva-based World Trade Organization chose Seattle as the location for their conference. Seattle had been on a big-time roll and the city seemed incapable of a misstep given their recent prosperity. All of that was about to change as the events at the end of 1999 would rock Seattle's self confidence and curb the appetite for inviting the world to our tranquil, green city. WTO was the organization which made the rules for global trade. There were factions who were attacking the WTO as a tool of corporate greed, grinding the face of the impoverished for the benefit of the rich. A hodge-podge of political groups joined forces in the streets of Seattle on November 30th.

Seattle had anxiously wooed the WTO to come with more than 5,000 trade delegates from 134 countries along with 3,000 journalists covering the proceedings. Seattle aspired to be the Geneva of the West. The city fathers thought that the troubled world could come to our lovely city to work out their problems. Seattle felt it could provide the right atmosphere for peace and understanding.

"We had it all," Pat Davis, the Seattle Port commissioner who helped invite the WTO to Seattle, reflected. "We were in the middle of boom times; everyone said, 'Sure, why not, Seattle is a Pacific Northwest gateway. We will put Seattle on the map.' And we did."

However, it was not as the city fathers had envisioned. Parts of the crowd resembled a street fair with some people marching in sea-turtle costumes. Several factions of people were involved as protesters, from labor unions to anarchists.

The trouble began early in the morning when the downtown streets were largely unoccupied. Marchers sat cross-legged by the hundreds, locking themselves together with

bicycle locks to block key intersections downtown. Their intent was to delay or disrupt the conference and the flow of commerce in downtown Seattle. They succeeded.

With the protesters in control of major intersections, their next strategy was to prevent delegates from being able to get from their hotels to the Convention Center. The massive crowd included angry people rampaging through the streets, while others held rallies, teach-ins and some even staged an early-morning street party. Meanwhile, a number of protesters still controlled the intersections using lockdown formations. This threw the Seattle traffic, which was challenging even on a good day, into total chaos.

Police attempted to get the streets reopened by firing pepper spray, tear gas and eventually, rubber bullets at the protesters. Police appeared to be overwhelmed by the size of the mob occupying downtown.

About noon, things turned ugly and violent when black-clad anarchists began smashing windows and vandalizing storefronts. Police retaliated and tried to stop what had become a marauding mob. This set off a chain reaction, as protesters pushed dumpsters into the middle of intersections and lit them on fire. Tires on police vehicles were flattened. Other factions in the mob joined the anarchists in the property destruction and violent confrontation with the police.

The opening of the meetings was delayed, and it took police much of the afternoon and evening to clear the streets. As I heard the news accounts and watched the real time coverage on television I had two thoughts---what is happening to my city and is Katie safe?

I got to the restaurant about 6 o'clock and waited anxiously for Katie. When the hostess asked me if I would like to be seated, I decided to go ahead and get a table. I asked if I could get a location where I could watch for my friend's entry into the restaurant. My stress was mounting.

I was kicking myself for not getting Katie's cell phone number yesterday. I was so blown away at seeing her again. I wasn't thinking clearly. Now I'd give anything to have her number and some way to contact her.

I anxiously watched the door as the clock ticked away. I nervously gulped ice water and then finally ordered a glass of wine about 6:30 in an effort to calm my jangled nerves. Katie was now a half an hour late and I wondered if maybe we weren't going to see one another. The minutes continued to tick by. I reflected on how unforeseen circumstances can suddenly pull people apart. Unforeseen twists of fate had torn Katie and me from one another when we were young. I was paranoid that it was happening again.

We were planning the simplest of events---meeting for dinner after work. But the simple attempt was becoming very complex. The riots were raging downtown and I'm sure that it was difficult to get through the traffic, the closed streets and who knows what else in the downtown core today.

I checked my watch and it was now ten till seven. I started thinking about what I'd do if Katie didn't come tonight.

The waiter interrupted my thoughts by asking if I would like to go ahead and order.

"Not yet, my friend is coming from downtown today and is obviously delayed," I responded.

"Oh yeah, a lot of trouble down there today," the waiter replied. "I'd hate to be anywhere close to downtown right now. No hurry sir. More wine?" I nodded yes. Thanks for the comforting words I thought. Unfortunately it was an accurate assessment.

When I turned my attention from the waiter, I saw Katie bustling in the door. I stood and waved to her. Her face broke into a broad smile. As she came to the table I embraced her and kissed her cheek.

"I'm so glad to see you," I said as I pulled out the chair for her. "I've been worried about you. Are you okay?"

"Now I am," Katie said. "What a nightmare downtown. It was unbelievable down there. It's been really crazy ever since the WTO thing started but it really blew up today. I was hoping you would still be here."

"No chance I would leave. I've been watching the news..."

She smiled and said, "Yeah I forgot who I was talking to. The rioting was so bad. They were breaking windows; throwing newspaper boxes through windows, spray painting buildings, violently fighting with the policemen. There were some people from my office who were innocently outside...running an errand or something...and they got pulled into the riots. One woman in my department was punched in the stomach and knocked to the ground. She came back to the office bleeding and her clothes torn. The mentality of riots can be so frightening."

"I know. I experienced that a few times in Berkeley."

Ignoring my comment she continued, "It was awful. We were looking out of our office windows and could see the WTO protesters coming one direction and the line of police coming towards them. It was so violent. I couldn't stand to watch it. It was so upsetting. I don't know what'll happen tomorrow. I might not go into work. I'm going to watch the news and call in before I go. I thought I'd never get out of downtown. All of the buses were running off schedule and the traffic was horrible. So many closed streets."

She was still really unstrung. "Can I get you some wine or something?"

"That would be great. You can tell I'm still really wound up."

I signaled to the waiter and indicated we wanted another glass of wine.

"I'm so sorry. I've been worried about you all day. I was such an idiot yesterday to not get your cell phone number. I wasn't thinking clearly yesterday."

"Well, it was your mother's funeral. I hope you didn't feel like I imposed, I didn't mean to disrupt the day or not show respect. I just couldn't resist a chance to see you again."

"I'm so glad you made the effort," I said with a smile. "Trust me; I couldn't be happier that you came yesterday. I haven't thought of anything else. I can't begin to tell you how delightful it was to see you. It's been so long...too long."

"Where do we begin?" Katie mused.

"How about some food, then we can start at the beginning. Are you hungry?"

"Starving," Katie said. "I didn't dare stick my head outside today to get any lunch. I was so frustrated and afraid that we might get robbed of our night together."

I reached out and squeezed her hand. "Try to relax Katie. We have a lot of time to catch up and be together. I've been so excited about seeing...everything is going to be okay now so just try to calm down."

We placed our order and then we were silent for a moment as we just smiled at one another.

"First of all," I wondered, "are you married? I guess I should find out if I'm having dinner with someone's wife."

"No," she said, "I'm divorced. It's probably been about 15 years ago."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I'm not."

“Actually,” I said, “I’m sorry you went through a divorce, but honestly, I’m glad you aren’t married. When I was checking you out during the funeral yesterday, I was really hoping that the guy sitting next to you wasn’t your husband.”

“No, I don’t know who he was. I just took an open seat. So you were checking me out yesterday huh?”

“Oh, ya think. I was practically drooling and I have no idea what was said at the funeral.”

Katie laughed and said, “Ooooh, that makes me feel bad. I didn’t mean to be a distraction.”

“No chance beautiful. You’re a wonderful distraction. You can’t help it that you are so gorgeous. Don’t feel bad. I meant it as a compliment. ”

She smiled flirtatiously and whispered, “Aren’t you nice. I was sad to see about your wife’s passing. I thought about trying to get in touch with you when I found out about that...but decided I’d better not.”

“I wish you had. It would have been wonderful to hear from you. How did you find out about my wife’s death?”

“Well, one night I was on the internet and I did some searches to try to find you. I saw some columns from the San Francisco newspaper. Pulse of the City, right?”

I smiled and said, “Yeah, I used to write that column.”

“But in my search your name came up as part of your wife’s obituary. That is so sad. I found out a few years after she passed. How old was she when she died? How long ago was that?”

“Wendy was 37 when she died of cancer. She died in 1989.”

“I’m so sorry Dan. How old was your daughter when her mother died?”

“Twelve.”

“So you have been a single dad for ten years or so?”

“Yeah. Probably not a very good one either.”

“Your daughter is beautiful. It seems like you raised a great kid. Are there any others?”

“No. We could only have one. Wendy had some complications...serious complications when she had Vicki.”

“That’s really tough. It makes me very sad to know you went through all of that.”

“I’ve had a pretty good life. Things just turned out *different*.”

“What do you mean by different?” Katie asked.

“Just different,” I said. “Different then I thought my life would be.”

We were silent for a moment and I realized I had no information about Katie yet.

“What about you? How many children do you have?”

“None.”

I wasn’t sure how to respond to that abrupt comment. “You and your husband didn’t have any children?” I said restating what Katie had replied a moment ago, but trying to proceed cautiously on this subject.

Katie just looked at me and said, “Well it’s kind of a long story.”

Just then our meals arrived to interrupt the flow of the conversation.

I scrambled to reset the conversation. I attempted to start again and return to the subject of children. “You know I looked for you on the internet several times too. I could never find you. I didn’t know what your married name was. I didn’t even know if you were still in Seattle. I found nothing.”

“That’s me,” Katie said sarcastically, “I guess I don’t make much of a footprint.”

“That’s never been true of you Katie,” I said reassuringly. But Katie remained quiet and just began to eat her food. She wasn’t going to bail me out of this awkward moment. As a veteran newspaperman who made a living by asking probing questions, I was struggling mightily about where to go from here.

Then I blurted out, “So what happened to you Katie?”

“You mean what happened after I had my heart broken by my high school sweetheart?”

I lowered my head at the sting of that comment. I glanced up and said, “Yeah...I guess after that.”

“Forgive me Dan. That was tactless and mean. I didn’t intend to put it that way. I always wondered what we would say to one another if we ever saw each other again. I had thirty years to come up with things to say. I should’ve found a better way than that to express myself.”

“You’ve nothing to apologize for,” I said, “I deserved that one. I’d like to explain.”

“You don’t owe me an explanation Dan, I’m very sorry I said that. I wish I could pull that one back. I was being mean and nasty. You don’t owe me anything at all Dan. I’m not angry at you. I don’t hate you. In fact, just the opposite, I’m so excited to see you again.”

“You’re not mean Katie. What made you want to come to the funeral? What made you decide to re-establish contact?”

“Because...because I was curious to see you. I wanted to see you. I...I still care about you very much. I wanted to see what it would be like to see you again. I saw the obituary in the Seattle Times. I spent a whole day and night agonizing about whether I should come or not. I would get excited about the possibility. Then I would change and think I should just move on. But something told me not to. I couldn’t resist. I finally concluded that I’ll always regret it if I didn’t go. Who knows when we would get another chance to see one another...if ever?”

“You made a good decision,” I said with a smile as I reached for her hand. “What’s it like to see me again?”

“It’s great. You seem so much the same. The same guy I was so madly in love with.”

“I wondered what it would be like to see you again too. Katie in some ways it seems like we haven’t been apart...I mean it seems so natural to be with you when we’re back together.”

Katie got tears in her eyes. “It seems that way to me too,” she said meekly.

“I confess to being very prejudice in regard to you, but you still look as pretty to me as you did in high school...maybe even better. You don’t seem to have aged at all.”

“Well, aren’t you sweet? Sweet, but wrong. You’re aware that middle-aged women need a lot of help to remain looking anything close to as good as they once were. I mean you live in the state where all of the artificial enhancements were invented. Weren’t boob jobs invented in San Francisco?”

I laughed and said, “I don’t care what you do to look so good. I’m just saying that you DO look fantastic. I love your hair. You’re still so pretty. I can’t help staring at you, just drinking you in. You blow me away pretty lady. I mean that sincerely.”

Katie was quiet and used her napkin to dab her moist eyes.

An unexpected wave of emotion washed over me. “Katie, beautiful, wonderful Katie, I really have missed having you in my life. Things didn’t work out the way I expected or what I wanted. I’m so sorry that I could never get back to you. I want to explain. I really *want* to explain...please let me tell you what happened to you and me...from my perspective.”

Katie interrupted and said, "But first I need to tell you some stories. I need you to understand what brought me to where I am today."

"Okay. Tell me whatever you want to tell me. I'd really like to know. I just so regret..."

Katie stopped me and said, "Wait. There're some things you need to know."

I wondered what would come next and just stared into Katie's green eyes which had a real intensity to them. I sensed it was very important that I quietly listen, to let her tell me her story.

"After you went to California, I got a job working as a receptionist at a dentist's office. It was my job all through college while I went to UDub (the University of Washington). Eventually, it grew into expanded responsibilities. I did all of the billing and accounting for a group of dentists in the practice. As you know, during our first year of college, we stayed in touch and hoped to get back together. Gradually our letters became more scarce and then they just stopped. I don't remember who stopped writing to who but the result was that I never heard from you again after that first year."

I wanted to correct that assertion but decided to hold my tongue and let her continue. I grabbed another piece of French bread and munched on it as I listened to Katie's narrative.

"For a while, I hated to see anyone from high school or anyone who knew you and me. They'd always ask me 'So how are you and Dan?' That wasn't really a discussion I wanted to have. It's not fun to keep explaining that you got dumped. But anyway, skipping ahead, towards the end of college, a new dentist came into the practice. He was this dazzling, handsome, smooth-talking guy that everyone instantly liked. His name was Marc Olsen. Marc was tall with thick black hair and vivid blue eyes. Every woman in the office and a lot of patients were instantly in love with him. Marc took an immediate liking to me."

"At least he had good taste," I interjected.

Katie smiled and continued. "One thing led to another and a short time after I graduated from college, Marc asked me to marry him. His parents lived in Santa Barbara but they had a lot of family in Seattle. Marc went to dental school here and joined the practice where I worked. We were married here in a big overblown wedding in the fall of 1975. Our honeymoon was in Mazatlan. He always did things in a very big way. In the beginning, that was exciting but it had a big downside later."

"Hmmm. I'm just thinking about what I was doing while this was happening to you. I was covering the Patty Hearst kidnapping, then Wendy and I were married in 1973. Sorry to interrupt. I was just trying to relate to the time frame."

"I think that's interesting too. I'd like to get a feel for the parallel events for you and me. Anyway, we began our married life. I left my job at the dental practice and started working at a mortgage company. I also became a CPA and began my career in finance. I worked for a few companies but I didn't like the volatility of the ups and downs in some of the real estate-related companies. So finally I landed where I am now. I wanted to work at a company that has been here forever and will be here forever. Security has always been important to me. That's what really attracted me to my current job now. Hopefully, we'll all survive Y2K and all of our accounting systems won't blow up."

"Where do you work? We haven't even talked about that?"

"Washington Mutual Bank. WaMu. I work in corporate headquarters downtown. I'm a department manager in the mortgage area."

"Oh, good for you Katie. How long have you been there?"

"Since 1977. Going on 23 years."

I smiled and gave her a thumbs up signal. The waiter poured some more wine in our glasses.

“Ooooh,” Katie groaned and said to me, “By the way, don’t let me have any more wine. I don’t know how many glasses I’ve had. No wonder I’m getting so mouthy.”

“You’re telling me about your marriage.”

“Yeah, well, Marc continued in his dental practice and was very successful and I launched my career in finance. Over the first few years we’d have discussions about starting a family. There was always a reason why ‘now is not a good time.’ We needed to pay off school loans or we had to get his practice more established--there was always a reason. The rationale for not having children was always logical, but after awhile I realized it was a symptom of a larger problem.”

“A larger problem?”

“Yeah. A problem that would eventually sink our marriage—selfishness.”

“What do you mean by selfishness?”

“I was being told we needed to wait until we could afford to have children but we continued to take extravagant trips, buy lots of toys, do everything to indulge my husband’s desire to throw money around and live the ‘good life.’ Like skiing in Park City, trips to Hawaii, Mexico, Jackson Hole. He was always playing golf and planning spendy outings with the other dentists in the practice who were high fliers also.”

“Just the kind of dentist I want to go to,” I mused, “one who has cash flow problems.”

“Exactly. I was really uncomfortable with that lifestyle. I’m pretty conservative in financial matters and I kept asking where all of this money was coming from. Marc would become really annoyed with me and would say he wanted me to be more carefree and fun.”

I think Katie noticed the concern etched on my face. I knew this story was not going to have a happy ending.

“The years went on. There was no desire on his part to start a family. I realized his life was all about him. It actually didn’t even include me. I began to feel like I was just an accessory, like his Beemer, his designer clothes and his season tickets to the Sonics games.”

“A pretty blonde wife,” I interjected.

“Yeah, I guess so. I was patient with that lifestyle, but having no children was starting to really gnaw at me. It was driving a wedge between us. I guess you could say that Marc gave me everything that money could buy, but nothing that money couldn’t buy. We had been married almost ten years when he did the ultimate selfish and narcissistic act.”

“Oh, no,” I gasped.

“Yeah, Marc began a fling on the side with some woman who was one of his patients. That was the end for me. Marc seemed puzzled as to why I couldn’t just ‘move past’ our problem, as he put it. We were divorced in 1985.”

“Where is he now?”

“I gave him a suggestion about where I thought he should go the last time I saw him. I don’t know if he followed my advice. I’ve no idea where he is. I heard he remarried. I don’t even know if he’s still in Seattle. He no longer exists as far as I’m concerned. That’s the one upside of divorcing someone without having children. You never have to see them again.”

“Oh Katie, I am so, so sorry that happened to you. If someone had you why would they ever want anyone else?”

“Well...”

Then I realized she was being kind and restrained. I had her, then I moved to California and got someone else. I left Katie.

“What happened after that? Has there been anyone else?”

“Just when you think life couldn’t get more fun,” Katie said sarcastically, “there is part two to the story.”

I waited, wondering what could be worse than what she had just revealed.

“After my divorce I moved back into my parents’ house. The idea was that it would be very temporary until I got a different place. I thought I might get a place in downtown Seattle to be close to work, etc. That’s not how it turned out. It was shortly after I moved back to their house in Ballard that my dad got really sick. Dad had a serious stroke and was in really poor health for several years. Mom couldn’t handle it by herself. Dad was in and out of hospitals before he finally died in 1989. I stayed with Mom through those years and helped her manage.”

“You never got to start your life over as a single woman?” I asked.

“No. Not then or in the way I envisioned. Things took another turn after that. I had noticed Mom was having problems during Dad’s last days.”

“Problems?”

“She just had trouble keeping track of things. She got confused and flustered easily. I attributed it to the stress of dealing with Dad’s illness. But it became apparent after Dad died that she was starting to have dementia. It became impossible to leave her alone. I had to assume more and more control. Weird things starting happening. Mom knew it, at times, and was frustrated at how her mind was slipping.”

“Did your sisters help you at all or did you have to do it all?”

“You remember my oldest sister, Kristi?”

I nodded. “I remember your sisters well.”

“Well Kristi has lived most of her life in San Diego with her husband. My other sister Marianne was moving about that time to Portland. Her husband was taking a new job in Oregon and they were in the middle of having kids. I was the one who took care of things. I don’t fault my sisters, but that made it so I never got to move on with my life in the way I wanted. There isn’t a lot of time for social life when you work each day and take care of ailing parents all night.”

“So about your Mom...”

“Mom went into a care facility in 1992. She died in 1995.”

It was devastating to hear the story of the fate Katie suffered. Her words cut me like a knife. I couldn’t help but feel guilty that I left her exposed to such a life. It made me so sad to think of the life Katie could have had and the one she actually did have.

She continued, “So when Mom moved out of the house I ‘celebrated’ my 40th birthday by myself. If celebrate is the word. Suddenly I found myself without a spouse, without children and with no family at all. I was 40 and alone.”

I just looked into her beautiful face and didn’t know what to say. I slowly shook my head and muttered, “Oh Katie.”

“I’ve adjusted I guess. In the last few years I’ve tried to deal with my fate. I’ve come to terms with the life I have. I’m not happy about it. I don’t know what I could’ve done differently. You just have to move on. I’ve tried.”

My pending response was cut off when we both realized that the restaurant was trying to close.

“Sorry,” I said to the waiter, “the time got away from us. We’ll leave.”

“No problem sir,” the waiter said, “There is no hurry.”

We gathered our things and headed for the door.

“Let’s continue our discussion. Give me a ride home. Is that alright?” Katie said.

“Of course, I don’t want this night to end.”

I had brought my mother’s Mercedes to my rendezvous with Katie. I pointed it out to her and we got in the car. My mind was reeling, trying to grasp the tale of Katie’s life that I had just heard.

As I began the drive to Katie’s house, she said, “do you remember how to get to my house?”

“I think I do. Some things you don’t forget unless all of the roads have changed.”

Katie smiled and said, “Thanks for listening. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be such a downer. I bet I killed your enthusiasm for spending much more time with me by regaling you with all of these happy little tales.”

“I’m just sad for what you’ve had to go through Katie. You seem remarkably positive and cheerful through it all. That’s always been one of your charming attributes. You’re so sweet and so upbeat even when things are difficult.”

“Thanks. I’ve had some bad times and some bad private moments.” Katie then attempted to divert the focus back to me. “So when did you say that Wendy died?”

“1989. It was October.”

“You were going through that and I was nursing my father during his last days. Not a good year for Dan and Katie huh?”

“No,” I said thoughtfully. “Wendy was a fighter. For a while I thought she was going to beat her cancer. During the summer of 1989 it became apparent that she wasn’t going to win. It was a summer when I lost hope. I had to start facing the inevitable conclusion...the death of my young wife.”

“I want to hear all about it Dan. Can you come inside so we can continue?”

“I’d love to but you have to go to work tomorrow...”

“I’d rather talk to you,” Katie said warmly.

As we pulled in front of the familiar house in the old neighborhood I smiled and said to Katie, “Your house looks great. Wow, the trees are so big.”

We walked onto the porch. I grabbed Katie’s hand as she fumbled for her house keys. She turned to look at me.

“How many times do you think I have kissed you on this porch?”

“I don’t know,” Katie said, “but I’d like it if you added one more to that total.”

Katie lowered her briefcase to the ground and put her arms around my neck. I kissed Katie for the first time in 30 years. I couldn’t stop. A surge in emotion was overtaking me. I was actually getting tears in my eyes. I held her tightly and kissed her again.

As we broke our embrace I could see, in the faint glow of the porch light, that Katie had tears in her eyes.

“You’re still the world’s best kisser,” I said to Katie.

“It’s funny,” Katie said, “it seems so familiar to me to kiss you, even after all of these years. It felt so good. You aren’t so bad yourself Dan. You still have it.”

“Just like riding a bicycle. I just realized how long it has been since I kissed a woman.”

“It’s been a damn long time since I kissed someone. I really like to kiss you Dan.”

Before I could respond Katie added, “Let’s go inside. We’re past the point of needing to stand on the porch in November and kiss.”

I laughed and said, "I just realized that the last time I was on this porch was when I left you my final letter."

Katie opened the door, turned and asked "What letter?"

"The one I left when I came back from Berkeley. I left it in this very same storm door when I came back to Seattle at the end of our first year of college," I said incredulously.

"I never got a letter like that," Katie said in a puzzled tone.

That thought hung in the air as we entered her home.

"It looks so great Katie. I love what you have done with this house." Katie had redecorated everything with new warm colors and new furniture. "It looks like Katie's house."

Katie smiled and said, "Let me give you the tour."

It was all updated and changed but it was a real walk down memory lane as I went from room-to-room. The memories of my time in this house with Katie...from so long ago...came flooding back into my mind.

Katie proudly walked me through her house. "I love it Katie," I said, "this is an amazing experience to be back here."

"Can you stay for a while? We have a lot more to talk about."

"I feel like I don't want to let you out of my sight now. But feel free to kick me out when you need to go to bed or have had enough or whatever..."

"I wasn't sure about going to work tomorrow anyway with everything going on downtown. I feel a personal day off coming on. Please stay and talk with me," she pleaded.

"I'm yours for as long as you want me tonight," I responded.

Katie took my hand and led me into her kitchen. We sat at the bar in her kitchen. "Let me make you some coffee?"

She busied herself pouring water into the coffee maker. I could now get a better look at her in the brighter light. I couldn't take my eyes off of her. My eyes took a walk all over Katie--her beautiful, thin body, her blonde hair, her warm smile and twinkling, green eyes. She looked incredibly good to me.

"I hope you don't mind me staring. It's been a long time. I suddenly feel vulnerable and insecure. I can't imagine that the years have been as kind to me as they have to you."

"You have nothing to worry about. You look pretty fantastic to me." She then brought two cups of coffee over to the bar and slid on to the bar stool next to me.

"How there been others since Marc? I would think you would need a social secretary or something."

"You're sweet but no others really. There are a few tales to tell later but you were telling me about a letter..." she said to redirect the conversation.

I began to tell her my story. I told her of the weekend when I returned to Seattle at the end of my freshman year of college. Her family was gone, so I left a letter for her stuck in the frame of the storm door on the porch. We discovered that she never received the letter. Something happened to it. It blew away or was somehow lost. Katie never got it. It broke my heart to hear this. She was certain that she never got it, especially when I told her of the contents.

"So you thought I got the letter but never responded because I didn't want you?" Katie asked.

"Yes."

Katie covered her face with her hands. "And I thought you never came back from Berkeley and never wrote to me again."

“Oh Katie,” I lamented as I lowered my head and groaned, “I don’t know what to say.”

“You still loved me then?”

“Of course I did,” I responded.

I continued to tell my story. I told her about my first year going to college in Berkeley. I told her how I met Wendy. I told her about my adventures as a newspaper man. She heard the story about the riot in Berkeley when Wendy and I were tear gassed while protesting the war in Vietnam. At times, Katie laughed. Sometimes she cried.

I revealed my inner most thoughts about my life and how it had transpired since I had seen her last. We discussed Wendy’s death and my life raising Vicki. I told her about the years of conflict with my father. Time seemed to pass so quickly. We only occasionally took a break to go to the bathroom or refill our coffee cups. I lost all sense of time.

The story of our lives came pouring out of both of us. I’d longed to have this talk with Katie for so many years. I never thought it would happen. But now the time had come. We spent the whole night looking into one another’s eyes and telling our stories.

At some point, we both started snickering when we realized that the morning light was coming through the kitchen window in Katie’s house.

“We’ve talked all night,” I announced.

“I’ve never talked all night with anyone,” Katie said.

“Neither have I,” I responded, “but of course you’re not just *anyone*.”

“Oh Dan,” Katie said leaning forward to kiss me. “We had bad luck my love. So many things could have happened differently and there would’ve been a different outcome for both of us.”

“I know sweetie,” I said, “I try not to think about that too hard. I don’t want to focus on what might have been. It makes me too crazy. I’m not sure I can handle dwelling on that. I sure had good luck yesterday and today. I think I have never stopped loving you Katie.”

“I love you too Dan,” Katie said. “Everything else has always seemed like a consolation prize. You’re always what I wanted but couldn’t have.”

We were silent and just looked at one another, deep in thought.

Katie said softly, “you poor man. You’re probably so tired. It was a long night.”

“It didn’t seem long at all. Katie, I’ll never forget this night. You and I will never lose one another again. Never!”

“I agree. I need to make you a nice breakfast.”

“Sure but I think I’m going to go into a coma if I have another cup of coffee.”

Katie laughed and said, “Let me leave a message at work so they know I’m not coming in. Then I’ll make you some food.” I nodded in agreement.

Then she added, “Dan, this has been one of the best nights of my life, despite the sad stories we’ve told one another.”

I grabbed her and kissed her again. “It breaks my heart to think...”

She gently rubbed my cheek with her hand, interrupted me and said, “I know sweetheart, but it’s no one’s fault. It’s life.”

We chatted about the week ahead. I told her that I had to begin to sort through all of the things in my parents’ two houses. It seemed to be an overwhelming task for the next few weeks.

“Spend a few days to try getting a handle on things, it’s going to be a lot to deal with,” Katie said.

“Can I see you again? Or have you had enough?”

“You better see me again. I haven’t had anywhere close to enough,” Katie said, “Let’s spend Saturday together. We’ll go have some fun.”

“I’d really like that.”

After breakfast, Katie walked me to the door and kissed me goodbye. She added, “We need to get some sleep. Call me when you wake up.”

“I can’t imagine sleeping now. I’ll probably just lay there and think about you.”

“I’m okay with that too. Call me later.” We started to part then Katie said, “Come here!” I took one step forward and she kissed me passionately.

“I needed one more,” she said and then watched me as I walked to my car.

CHAPTER FOUR

REMORSE

December 1, 1999

Definition of Remorse: a deep, torturing sense of guilt felt over a wrong that one has done; self-reproach; feeling or expressing pain or sorrow for sins or offenses

How much responsibility can one person take for the outcome of another's life?

Katie was very generous and forgiving when she said, "it's no one's fault, it's just life." I was having trouble just passing off the events we discussed last night as "just life." I clearly had a hand in the outcome.

The decisions we make every day in our lives are like pebbles tossed into a pond. One stone disrupts the tranquil, smooth surface of the water. It sets off a ripple which widens and expands. Soon the circle widens and rolls across the entire pond. Additional pebbles tossed into the pond will set off similar chain reactions of the ripples. It doesn't take many stones before the ripples are interacting and crashing into one another.

Seemingly innocent, isolated decisions can set off ripples in our lives and the lives of those we interact with. Multiple decisions compound the ripples and soon there is no more tranquility in the pond.

I should have never let Katie go. I still vividly recall the July evening when I left my innocent, sweet, trusting high school sweetheart standing on the porch crying as I drove away. By not coming back to get her—as I had promised—I left her vulnerable to the evils of the world and to people like Marc Olsen. People who would trample on her innocence and blight her life. People who would not cherish and love her as I did. Those who would just use her for their own purposes and then discard her. I should have never let that happen.

That is clearly the result of decisions I made. It is extremely hard for me to not imagine alternate story lines. I am tortured by all of the "what ifs." Listening to Katie tell me the story of her life "after her high school sweetheart broke her heart" made me feel ill and shattered.

What if I had returned home at Christmas during my first year of college? Katie told me then that she had made so many plans for that holiday season. I ruined them and left her alone. What would have happened if I had spent that holiday season with her? I feel certain we would have reaffirmed our love and our intentions of always being together.

Katie might have come down to Berkeley to go to school the following summer. We could have shared our adventure in the Bay Area together. I would have undoubtedly married Katie in that scenario. It would have been tough but we would have faced it together.

In this scenario there would have never been a Marc Olsen. Katie would have been my lover, my wife, my soulmate and eventually the mother of my children. I know Katie would have loved living in San Francisco. Katie would have been the best mother ever—so sweet, so loving, and so giving.

When Katie's parents became ill years later, we could have dealt with those circumstances—together. Katie would not have fought all of her battles alone. I would have been there to protect her and nurture her.

There are other scenarios which torture my mind. Even if I hadn't come home at Christmas...what if...Katie had been home when I finally did return to Seattle in April of my first year of college? What if the letter hadn't been lost? I was devastated to hear that she never got the letter. I will never forget the feeling in the pit of my stomach when Katie asked last night, "What letter?"

What are the odds that I would randomly pick the worst weekend possible to return to Katie in Seattle? I happened to pick the one weekend--maybe the only one that year--when her family was out of town. What if I could have connected with her before to make plans? What if I had talked to her before I came for that weekend? Maybe she would have skipped the family reunion in Oregon. Maybe we could have had a long talk and gotten by all of the miscommunication which scuttled our relationship. I could have looked into her pretty eyes and poured out my heart to her. I could have told her the feelings of my heart instead of putting them in a letter. A letter which was lost.

All of these misunderstandings; The bad luck; The bad timing.

Are all of these things just random events? Is life like a poker game? The next random card off of the deck could make me a winner or a loser. Was I just dealt a losing hand? Why did things not work out no matter how hard I tried?

I've always felt that the measure of a man is that he must take a stand against evil to protect the innocent. Katie was clearly innocent and trusting. I left her unprotected.

Katie was like a valuable work of art. A beautiful Monet painting. Marc Olsen swindled me out of my prized, cherished Monet. He defaced it, used it and then hung it in his basement instead of displaying the painting in a prime, honored place.

Another 'what if' that haunts me as I reflect on the mistakes and decisions of the past are ones related to technology. In 1970, how I wish I could have left messages on Katie's phone to let her know I was trying to find her. I could have let her know that I still loved her and I was trying to get back to her...I was really trying.

If Katie and I had cell phones then this whole misunderstanding would have never happened. We could have e mailed one another or called one another every day when I was in Berkeley. I would have never lost her. Of course that is not what happened. It wasn't in the cards in 1970. It was part of the losing hand I was dealt.

One very troubling aspect of these 'what ifs' is Wendy. If any of these scenarios could have occurred a different way, Wendy would have never been my lover and my wife. She might have just been a good friend, an interesting girl, I met at college.

But I loved Wendy. I think I'm still devastated by her death which occurred ten years ago. I don't think I have been the same since. I wouldn't give up one minute of time I have spent in my life with Wendy. Without Wendy there would be no Vicki. I would definitely be a poorer man if there was no Vicki.

I don't understand it all. I didn't know that in 1970 I had come to the end of a hallway of a strange building. At the end of the hallway were two unmarked doors. One on the left and one of the right. Behind one door was Katie and my future with her. Behind the second door was Wendy and an alternate life. I choose the second door. I didn't know what the implications were for those people behind the first door.

It is like the ripples on the pond. I can control the decision about whether I will throw the stone into the pond. However, once I cast the pebble into the water I lose control. I can't control where the ripples go. I can't control how the ripples interact with other ripples.

I'm devastated to hear what happened to Katie. I love her so much. I never meant to harm her. I never meant to hurt her. I never meant to leave her vulnerable so others could hurt her. It was never in my heart to cause pain to anyone. I didn't want any of that to happen. I'm so sad.

But now, I can control what happens from today forward. I have much more pondering to do. Katie and I have a lot more to discuss.

I need to get some sleep.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONFLICTING SIGNALS

June 14, 1969

"I ain't got no quarrel with them Viet Cong" - Cassius Clay

On this sunny Saturday afternoon I sat on the peak of the roof of my parents' house in Ballard. I looked over the horizon and saw the tall buildings of the Seattle skyline gleaming in the distance. The water surrounding downtown also shimmered in the early summer sunlight. It was a spectacular day. Today was also the beginning of a new phase of my life.

I was sitting on the roof because my Dad wanted me to adjust the television antenna. A few days earlier, a windstorm had given our antenna a spin. My father had been griping his head off since then because our television reception had been messed up. There were ghosts. When Dad watched Walter Cronkite giving the news, there were two Uncle Walters. Now Dad was trying to watch the baseball game of the week, and his threshold of pain had been exceeded.

I had been peacefully listening to records in my room when Dad yelled for me to come and help him. We moved the mahogany cabinet television into position so Dad could see it from the front door of our house. Dad was going to stand on the porch and yell instructions up to me as I adjusted the antenna. When the picture was to his liking again, I could come down. We were just ready to begin when the phone rang.

Dad hollered up to me on the roof and said, "Hang in there Dan, it's Uncle Jerry."

I knew I might as well take a seat and enjoy the view from the roof. Dad's brother Jerry is an epic talker. I would swear that if Uncle Jerry called to ask what was new, and you replied "our house is on fire, we were just trying to escape", Jerry would just keep talking. He seemed oblivious to anything you said. Communication was not a two-way process with Uncle Jerry. He was a very friendly, nice guy but he called to dispense some information to you and you were going to get the whole load of bricks regardless of your current circumstances.

Last night was my high school graduation. As I sat on the roof I thought about last night. I couldn't believe that I was no longer a student at Ballard High School. Katie and I went to an epic party last night with a bunch of friends. Katie was, of course, one of the main attractions at the party. She had been THE girl in our high school for our junior and senior years. Everyone loved Katie. No one loved her as much as I did however.

I wondered what the future now held for me individually, and for Katie and I as a couple. Whatever my future would be it had to include Katie.

Sitting on the roof looking into the distance, my thoughts turned to my career and college. An important person had come into my life during the second half of my junior year. It was my journalism teacher and the faculty advisor to the student newspaper, Mrs. Emily Robinson.

Over the years if I picked up a high school yearbook and thumbed through it, I would usually go the faculty page and look at Mrs. Robinson's picture. She was a total babe. She was so pretty and sweet. How could I have not noticed that in high school? I guess I just thought of her as a teacher.

Mrs. Robinson had creamy white skin and large light blue eyes. She was tall and thin with light brown hair which fell in soft curls around her face. In later years, I would think of her and realize that she was some lucky guy's beautiful 30-something-year-old wife. She made her living teaching a bunch of obnoxious high school kids. Mrs. Robinson had the misfortune of teaching high school around the time of the popularity of the movie "The Graduate." This caused the boys at my high school to make crude jokes about "Mrs. Robinson" behind her back.

But Mrs. Robinson gave me a great gift. She saw something in me that I didn't see in myself. She recognized that I had a talent for writing. I was focused on playing baseball and football, and dating the head cheerleader and homecoming queen. Mrs. Robinson knew something I didn't know. All of that was very fleeting. I had another calling in life.

She nurtured me as a writer. When I would hand in assignments she seemed kind of hard on me sometimes. Mrs. Robinson wanted me to try harder. She would keep me after class and review my writing in detail and give me suggestions. Mrs. Robinson pushed me. She knew I was coasting or distracted. "You're capable of much more," she would often tell me.

I would become annoyed with her sometimes. "Why was she always hassling me?" I wondered. She wanted me to realize how good I could be, she would say. Mrs. Robinson pushed me to enter a writing contest for all the high school students in the Puget Sound area. I felt like she was acting like my football coach at times. She stayed on my back until I did my best. I actually won the writing contest.

Last January, Mrs. Robinson sat down with me to review an opportunity. It was a discussion which would change my life. She had researched various intern programs being offered by some of the major metropolitan newspapers on the West Coast. If you were accepted in one of the intern programs, you could begin working in a big-city newspaper as an understudy. There were also chances to have your tuition paid or partially-paid as part of the internship programs.

I applied at both of the Seattle's dailies. I applied at Portland's daily newspaper, The Oregonian and, at her urging, I applied at the major newspapers in the San Francisco Bay Area. I had submitted my application to the San Francisco Chronicle and William Randolph Hearst's old newspaper, The San Francisco Examiner. I also applied at the Oakland Tribune.

I applied for admission at the University of Washington in Seattle, Portland State and then at UC-Berkeley. I was accepted at all three colleges. The decision about which college I would attend was dependant on how the newspaper internships turned out. If I could get on with one of the Seattle newspapers, I would stay at the UDub. Katie was already planning to go there. I could conceivably go to Portland State if I was accepted at The Oregonian.

I would even go to California if one of the San Francisco newspapers worked out. That would be really cool, but I thought it was a long-shot. A big downside would be going to Berkeley and not being with Katie. I wasn't too worried about it at this point because I wasn't sure I was going to be accepted into any of the internships. The competition was undoubtedly fierce. I would love to work at a newspaper though. I had wanted to be a writer and work for a newspaper for as long as I can remember.

I thought the most likely outcome would be that I wouldn't get an internship, and probably just go to UDub with Katie. I would get a Journalism degree and then try to get a newspaper job later.

Last night at graduation, Mrs. Robinson asked me if I had heard anything yet. I said no. She gave me a slip of paper with her home phone number on it and said, "Call me when you hear something. Don't worry, it's still early. I think you have a great shot at it, Dan."

I had been lost in my thoughts and I was getting tired of sitting on the roof. My day dreaming was interrupted when I noticed the mailman walking up our front walk to bring today's mail. About the time the mailman reached the porch, my dad popped out and said, "Okay let's get this done." Apparently, he had finally ditched Uncle Jerry.

Dad kept shouting instructions up to me as I turned the antenna. Finally, he said, "Right there Dan, that's perfect." Now I could get off the roof.

When I returned to the ground, I intended to just head back into my room and resume listening to music. Maybe I would call Katie and see if she wanted to go do something.

"Here's one for you," Dad said as he handed me a letter as he sorted through the mail. My eyes opened wide as I saw the logo of the San Francisco Examiner on the return address. Suddenly, I couldn't get it open fast enough. Mentally I was trying to prepare for what it said. It would probably be the first of several letters saying, "we appreciate your application but no thanks."

As I unfolded the letter I saw the words of the first sentence. "We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted in the San Francisco Examiner's intern program." My mouth flew open as I continued to anxiously read the details.

"Dad! Dad!" I called, "I got accepted in the newspaper internship program. The San Francisco Examiner!"

"Great son, but you don't want to go to San Francisco do you?"

"Of course I do, are you kidding? This is the San Francisco Examiner. I can do this and go to Cal-Berkeley."

"Well, that's great but wait to see what else comes. Congratulations pal, I'm proud of you son. But seriously, are you going to move to San Francisco and go to school with all of the damn hippies in Berkeley?"

"Dad, Cal is a great school. But don't you understand? This is the San Francisco Examiner! This is William Randolph Hearst's newspaper. This is the big-time, Dad!"

Dad shot me a puzzled look, "Well, it's flattering to be accepted and to know you could have gone there, but why leave Seattle? You don't want to go to school down there. Katie's going to the UDub right?"

"You don't get it. This is the same as if I was a baseball player and I just got offered a contract by the Yankees!" I said in frustration trying to use the baseball analogy so Dad would understand. "The Examiner—that's the Yankees, Dad!"

"I've been meaning to talk to you about your future. I didn't know this was all going to happen today. You did just graduate last night. But let's talk about your future for a minute," Dad countered.

"There's not much left to talk about now. This is so amazing! A lot of decisions just got made. This is what I've been waiting for. Now I know what I'm going to do," I said excitedly.

Dad then played the Katie card. "Are you going to leave Katie behind? That is one great girl."

"That is one great girl Dad," I offered, "no one needs to convince me of that. Katie knows about what I was trying to do. She supports me. We'll work this out. Katie could eventually come down there and go to school."

"Katie going to Berkeley? Why would she want to do that? I think you need to think this through more thoroughly, Dan. Plus there is something else I want you to consider. I think before you launch into your college and career you should think about giving something back to

your country. You need to do your part. We're at war now. Every young man needs, at some point, to kick-in and give back to this great country."

"What! Are you telling me you want me to go to Vietnam before I go to college? Are you crazy? Do you think I'm going to turn down this internship so I can go get my ass shot off by the Viet Cong? Dad, you remember John Russon? He was the catcher on my baseball team last year."

"Yeah, I remember him," Dad replied as his face turned red reflecting his agitation.

"Well, John was killed in Vietnam last week. I heard that last night. He was a year older than me but I played baseball with him. Last year he was standing here in June, like I am today. John had just graduated from high school. Now he's dead."

"You want me to start listing the friends of mine who were killed fighting the Japs in the south Pacific? I have a much longer list than you, Dan."

"Good Dad. I'll go over to see John's parents today and tell them they don't have it so bad because my Dad lost more friends in his war."

"Don't be a wise ass. I'm just saying this is part of life. I'm sorry about John. He was a nice kid. But it's part of being an American. At some point, we all have to give back...or should."

"Dad, I love my country and I respect very much what you and your generation did. You fought evil. You fought bad people who were trying to enslave everyone. I'm sure I can't imagine all that you experienced Dad. You're a hero. But your war is not the same as what's going on in Vietnam. This is a civil war. We're jumping in the middle of it and losing good young men like John, for what? This cause is not worth dying for. We ought to be careful about where we send our heroes—our good young men. Vietnam ain't it."

Now Dad was really angry, "We're stopping Communism, that's what we're doing. The Communists are just as much a threat as Hitler and the Japs. These are bad people too, Dan."

"It's not our right to go around the world killing every bad person. It's just not our job! We have our own problems here. Big problems that need to get fixed. We're not in a very strong position to be telling other people how they should live."

"This is the greatest country on the face of the earth," Dad snorted.

"It depends on who you talk to. We have black people who don't have freedom. They are met with billy clubs and fire hoses. We've got this stupid war which LBJ started for no good reason. Thousands of young guys, just like me, have had their hopes and dreams snuffed out forever, for what?! For no good reason Dad! Then we have two leaders who recognized these problems—Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King. They both got gunned down last summer and now we're stuck with Nixon. Meanwhile, there are protests in the streets and the frustrated black people are burning their neighborhoods. Look at the Democratic Convention in Chicago! That should make us all proud to be Americans!"

"We have a lot of trouble makers in our country right now who are trying to ruin this country," Dad countered.

"Trouble makers! Who's the trouble maker? The black man who's not free? Or is it the people who are perpetrating the atmosphere where all men aren't free. Why does every generation have to be defined by war, Dad? Maybe my generation could be defined by making peace. Wouldn't that be a nice change?"

"What is the matter with you? You're hopelessly naïve son. So Dan, do you think I should have just flashed the peace sign at the Japs when they were dropping bombs on my ship

in Pearl Harbor? Do you think I should've done that? Would that be your suggested more enlightened way to deal with things?"

"Dad, why do you and I have to have a big fight just as I receive great news-- just when I'm so excited?"

"I'm disappointed in your attitude, Dan."

"Disappointed! I played two varsity sports in high school, I was on the honor roll, I got almost all As. I was accepted at Cal and two other colleges and now I have this great opportunity in San Francisco. You could do worse for a son."

"Dan I've always been proud of you, but I think you're making a big mistake to go down there with all of those people. Your brother, Ray, plans to serve his country. What do you plan to do for your country? That's all I'm asking. It's time to stand up and be a man."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do for my country, Dad...I'm going to go be the best writer I can be. I'm going to college and I'm going to be a responsible, contributing member of society. That's what I'm doing for my country, Dad!"

My dad said nothing but looked very sternly at me.

Then I couldn't resist one more shot. "And by the way, Dad, I agree with 'those people' down in Berkeley. We need to get-the-hell out of Vietnam and that stupid war! Dad I'm going to take your advice. I'm going to stand up and be a man. I'm going to school in Berkeley and I'm going to work at the newspaper in San Francisco. You can't stop me! I'm really disappointed that you're not happy for me."

With that I stormed off to my room and closed the door. I was seething. My dad just ruined one of the happiest days of my life. It was time to call someone who understood and could share my happiness.

Over the years, when I would wonder about the aloofness I felt from my dad or I wondered why we weren't closer, I would remember this day. I don't think either of us would ever forget today. I don't think we ever forgave one another. The conversation on that sunny Saturday in 1969 permanently changed my relationship with my father. I felt he would only accept me if I did everything his way.

After returning to my room I decided to call Katie. I asked if I could come over and share my big news. I told her about the San Francisco internship.

"Wow, San Francisco," she said. "We do have a lot to talk about."

"We're going to be okay though, Katie. I have a plan for us. Don't worry baby, it's all going to work out. I'll be over in a minute."

As I prepared to leave for Katie's house, one more thought occurred to me. Mrs. Robinson! I looked for the slip of paper she gave me last night and found it on my dresser.

I dialed her number and she answered.

"Mrs. Robinson?"

"Yes."

"It's Dan. Dan Murphy."

"Hey Dan, of course I know it's you."

I cut her off and said, "Mrs. Robinson, I got an internship!"

"What? Where?"

"The San Francisco Examiner."

She let out a whoop. "San Francisco! Oh, Dan you did it. I'm so proud of you. I knew you could do it. San Francisco! Oh my gosh. That's so amazing."

“I couldn’t have done it without you. Thank you so much for your support and encouragement.”

“That talent was always there Dan. I just helped you realize it.”

“I’m so happy and San Francisco--that’s the best,” Mrs. Robinson exclaimed. “Dan, have you ever been to San Francisco?”

“I haven’t.”

“Well, you’re in for a treat. It’s a fantastic place Dan. I’ve been there a few times. I went on my honeymoon to San Francisco. It’s a magical place. It sure is where everything is happening now. And UC-Berkeley! What a great school! You’ll really be where the action is.”

“Definitely,” I said. “Mrs. Robinson I just wanted to let you know. Thanks for being excited for me and for all of your help. I don’t know how I could ever repay you.”

“You just go make me proud, Dan! I know you will.”

CHAPTER SIX

SEE YOU SOON

July 5, 1969

*Made up my mind, make a new start
Goin' to California with an achin' in my heart
Someone told me there's a girl out there
With love in her eyes and flowers in her hair
(lyrics to song "Going to California" by Led Zeppelin)*

I was finishing packing my bags for California. I was going to drive my Karman Ghia to Berkeley. It would take quite awhile to get there. It was probably more than I could drive today. However, now that the goodbyes had been said, I was bursting with enthusiasm and couldn't wait to get to Berkeley and San Francisco.

Mom wanted me to call when I got there. She also wanted me to call if I stopped in southern Oregon for the night. Mom told me I should stop if I got too tired. Gee thanks, Mom, I thought, that wouldn't have occurred to me unless you had mentioned it. Katie also wanted a call when I got there.

Last night as we watched the fireworks, I said goodbye to Katie. I'd spent every possible minute with her on the 4th of July weekend. It tore my heart out to leave behind my beautiful golden girl. After the fireworks, we decided we needed a little more time to talk, even though we had worked out our plan in great detail. Katie suggested we drive to Dick's Drive-in to get a shake and a burger, so we could sit in the car and talk just a little longer.

Katie was dressed in a red and white striped t-shirt and white denim shorts. She was a feast for the eyes. I savored each touch and each kiss the whole weekend. I tried not to think of everything as being "the last" time we would do things. I rubbed her smooth, tan legs as we drove to the hamburger place.

After we placed our order, Katie turned to me and smiled with tears in her eyes for the first time. She had been brave since mid-June when the San Francisco offer came.

"I'm sorry; I was trying really hard to not do this. I'm so excited about your opportunity and our future. It's just that I'm going to miss you so much," she said as the tears finally spilled over and ran down her cheeks.

"Oh baby, don't cry. I'm going to miss you so much too. You're a part of me. It's painful to leave you, but I promise I'll come back to you. I'll come back to take you to California later just like we've planned. This will work."

"I know," Katie said, drying her eyes with a napkin from the drive-in. "I know. I know this is the right thing. I just wish it was already a year from now and we were going there together. I wish we had all of this behind us."

"Never doubt how much I love you," I said. "You're the love of my life, Katie. I'm trying to be brave too. I have no idea what I'm getting into down there. I don't know what it will be like. I don't know what it will be like to not be with you every day."

“Me neither Dan,” Katie said, “but I promise I’ll be brave. I’m just afraid you will get down there and find it to be so exciting...and then you’ll forget about me. With all of those California girls running around...maybe you’ll forget me.”

“I already have the most beautiful girl on earth, how could I do better? For two years Katie I’ve thought about little else but you. That’s not going to change. There’s no chance I will forget you. I love you with all my heart Katie.”

“You’re the only one I’ve ever wanted or ever loved, Dan. I know we are young. I know this time apart is going to test our love. But never doubt my total commitment to you. It’s hard to fall so completely in love when we are this young,” Katie softly said. “Just because we’re young doesn’t mean that we can’t find the love of our life. We will get through this. I want you Dan. I want to live my life with you.”

“Me too sweetheart,” I responded. “My love for you is not high-school-love. It’s grown-up-love. We just need to work through this year. Then you can come to Berkeley to be with me. We can begin our life together. I would love to have this adventure with you, Katie. We will have *our* adventure. You’ll be in Berkeley with me. I promise.”

“I know sweetie. I don’t mean to make you sad on our last night together,” Katie said.

“But it won’t be our last night together. Just for now. I’ll come back to you. This is just the beginning not the end. I have no doubt though that it’s going to be hard. It’s going to be really difficult and painful to be apart...”

Katie interrupted and grabbed my hand, “Our love will survive. We’ll make it, Dan. I have no doubt. I have so much faith in you sweetheart. I’m so proud of you. I’ll anxiously await news of how it’s going. I’m so glad you have this chance.”

“I’m doing it all for us Katie,” I said in a voice choked with emotion. “I’m going to build a future for us. It’s for us Katie.”

“I’m so lucky to have you,” Katie said. “We are going to be okay, I’m just a little sad tonight because this part of our life is ending.”

We embraced as we sat in the car and said nothing more. I ate my hamburger and milkshake. Katie just picked at her food and offered it to me.

“I guess we’d better go,” Katie said, “you have a long trip tomorrow. Please be careful. Be safe.”

“I will baby, don’t worry,” I said. “By the way, you’re not exactly a wallflower who goes unnoticed. It makes me a little nervous that you’re going to be walking around the UDub campus without me. You’re the kind of girl who attracts a lot of attention. Remember me too, okay?”

“You have nothing to worry about,” Katie said with a smile. “I belong to you. I’m going to be pretty busy myself. I’ll be working on our future too. I’ll be going to school and now working at the dentist’s office. I’m going to get as many hours as possible there. Since I’m living at home, I can save a lot of money. I can put away the money for our future, for when I join you in California.”

“You’re right baby, we’ll both be busy. Time will go fast. We’ll be together at Christmas and we’ll talk and write all the time.”

The moment came that I had so dreaded. I pulled to the curb in front of Katie’s house. We looked at one another and said nothing. I looked deep into her green eyes which were getting red. Her chin began to quiver.

“I’m trying to be brave, I really am,” she said quietly.

“I know, my love. Wait, I’ll come around and walk you to the door.”

I walked around the car and opened her door. I took her hand and tried to drink-in the sight of my beautiful Katie as she left the car. Her beautiful legs. Her perfect, petite body. That flawless gorgeous face, and her long blonde hair tied in a ponytail today. There was no one more beautiful than my Katie. She was just as beautiful on the inside as she was on the outside.

“Okay,” Katie said as she tried to momentarily perk up. “I can’t tell you goodbye, ever. It’s too sad. So when you leave tonight, let’s just say ‘see you soon.’ We’ll see each other soon, right?”

“Alright,” I said with a smile. “I’ll always see you in my dreams Katie.”

When we got to the porch we gave each other a passionate, long kiss. Then Katie pulled away and said, “See you soon.”

“Okay,” and I quickly turned and walked off of her porch. Katie lingered on the porch watching me walk to the car. I turned for one more look. Katie stood smiling at me in the dim, golden glow of the porch light. I gave one more faint wave of my hand and then got in my car. I could tell Katie was crying. I couldn’t stand to look back as I drove away.

It would have been a crushing blow on this warm night in 1969 to know that I wouldn’t see Katie’s face for 30 years. I would only see her in the pictures I had and, as I told her, in my dreams.

Had I known what lay ahead of me, I wouldn’t have been able to leave. I drove away from Katie’s house that night brimming with hope and excitement for the future. I was also bursting with love for Katie. I’d never loved her more than I did tonight. I was very optimistic despite my sadness. I was sure I could work it all out. I would come back to Katie. No matter what!

The final scene was very fresh in my mind as I headed down Interstate 5 on the road to my future. After staying up so late to say goodbye to Katie I made it as far as the California-Oregon border before I felt myself cratering.

I stopped at a motel and called my Mom to let her know I had stopped. I decided that I would call Katie tomorrow night after I got there. I wasn’t sure I could emotionally or financially have a big conversation with her tonight. Tomorrow I would enter California.

After falling dead asleep in exhaustion at the Oregon motel, I arose early with renewed enthusiasm. I had thought of this day for so long. Today was the day. Today I would see San Francisco. Tonight I would sleep in Berkeley.

My excitement grew when I was able to tune in to the San Francisco radio stations as I drove along. For the first time, I heard the great rock music of San Francisco on KFRC. I was getting closer.

I continued my journey and felt excitement every time I saw a San Francisco mileage sign. I had a lot of time to think. There was so much to think about. I really started to focus on the tasks ahead.

After receiving the initial letter from the San Francisco Examiner, I called my contact there. He congratulated me and said they were thrilled to have me join them. I was told that I could work a flexible schedule at the newspaper, depending on my class schedule. I would earn an hourly-wage for each hour I put in at the newspaper. The newspaper would pay my tuition. I would need to pay my own housing and expenses.

As with any job, the newspaper could terminate our relationship if they felt it wasn’t working out. If it did work out I could eventually be considered for a full-time job as a reporter. My internship would consist of doing miscellaneous chores around the newsroom but I would

also be given assignments. I would also be accompanying reporters to events and on assignments to be schooled in the ways of the news gatherer.

It was an incredible opportunity. I would not fail. I was willing to bust my butt to do anything to succeed. This was my big chance. It's like I told my father, I was now getting a chance to play on the Yankees. I didn't want to strike out. I would not. This was my moment.

I was making significant sacrifices in pursuit of my career...in pursuit of my dream. I was going to work for a big-time, big-city newspaper in one of the most exciting cities on earth.

The Bay Area was going to be incredible. All of the culture, the great San Francisco music scene, Haight Ashbury, Berkeley--it was the center of the universe in 1969, all eyes were on the Bay Area.

Then there was my college. Today I was going to check into the housing office and find out where I would lay my head tonight and for many nights to come. I also needed to make sure I knew how to get from Berkeley to San Francisco and back. I'd be commuting back and forth each day. I needed to locate the Examiner in the vast city and discover the best possible route to get there.

Today I would get settled in Berkeley. I could then spend the weekend driving around and exploring San Francisco and my new exciting surroundings. Monday I would go to the newspaper for the first time.

Suddenly, I realized I was almost there. I would have to be careful not to miss the Oakland or Berkeley turnoffs. I slowed down and intently watched the road signs.

Then I caught my first glimpse of San Francisco. I saw it across the water of San Francisco Bay. It was gleaming in the summer sun on a beautiful California afternoon. This was the city of my hopes and dreams.