

LOVE AND  
WORK

*A NOVEL*

BY

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Dedicated to My Parents  
Without Whose Rescues and Forgivenesses  
This Book Might Not Have Happened



## PART I

### 1.

#### Getting Lucky

David Carmichael stared into the open refrigerator in front of him intently. It was stuffed full of food he wasn't interested in eating. There was bologna, leftover spaghetti, and some hamburger. There was salad, salad dressing and ketchup, mostly a lot of sandwich ingredients that the house ate in this, their communal kitchen. He switched to the freezer. Frozen pizza, frozen chicken nuggets and popsicles greeted him. It was food and he was glad of it but none of the shared stash seemed healthy or appetizing to him. Eventually he closed the door and sat down at the table in the sizeable kitchen area of the house. Bread and rolls were to be found wrapped in plastic in a basket on a nearby stand. There was no one else around in the room to disturb it.

Rory, the counselor, sat in the room down the hall that served as the counselor's office. David didn't hear

anything from down there, and the rest of the house with seven bedrooms seemed empty for the moment. David sat still. He didn't really care about eating; it was early afternoon and he didn't always eat lunch. He didn't really eat much because he found the food was so unappetizing, although he was careful to eat enough to moderate his mood. He was 40 now and having regular habits was sort of an obsession with him.

The other occupants of the house used the kitchen in their own time. Frozen food was popular and there was a pantry full of canned food nearby. Some asked for lots of requests when Annie, the house director, went shopping every week. Others didn't think of much and ate from the stocks of food in the pantry. The food bought special for the community meals cooked by the counselors was kept in another freezer downstairs. The arrangements were shaped by long experience (the house was about 10 years old) for accommodating the people who stayed there. The people who had experienced homelessness ate the most.

David sat and thought. The table was covered with crumbs and dirty dishes from earlier breakfasts and the coffee maker was left on with generous amounts of sugar scattered around on the counter. David had been homeless himself but that seemed like a long time ago now. It was back when he was a teenager too like some of his housemates still were, or at least nearly. It required all his letting-go power to relax and leave alone the constant minor chaos of the house. He kept to himself for the most part while the other residents

often spontaneously went on outings or did drugs together. It all seemed a little unreal to David who was not interested in drinking or doing drugs with anyone. He had done his share in days past but the other the residents just made them seem sordid and ridiculous to him. There was a sticky spot on the table where someone had spilled maple syrup.

The other residents were unlike anyone else David had ever known. They had their own habits and tendencies but their lives seemed kind of like a dead end street to David. Some tried to make plans or imagine futures for themselves but most didn't even really do that. Just more waiting to stumble into some loose change to buy Marijuana or Spice with. To David these didn't even seem like drugs worth doing. They just seemed like a headache or a passing irritation and he had a hard time relating.

David didn't know all the counselors at Allen Avenue. The kids, as he thought of them, although some were in their thirties, barely concealed their habits and most of the counselors tried to be easy going and made only small efforts to chastise them or impose discipline. The counselors and supervisors knew that discipline was a pretty futile thing with these young men and just keeping a semblance of order was the main priority. They expressed disappointment in a sort of parental way and were slow to write people up. David didn't really question their judgment because things went better this way.

David spent most of his time in his room, especially at night when the overnight counselors were there. The house was active at all hours but he didn't complain. Instead he held a pillow over his head when the music was loud and just endured the chaos. The others had no regular habits and it was not uncommon for music to be blasting at 3AM. David thought of himself as sort of an intellectual and he wondered what was the best approach to reacting to these young men in their circumstances. His belief was that people should be encouraged according to their abilities and helped according to their needs. Some of the other residents were pretty obviously in need of assistance but the problem was more complex with others. The former were people with prominent symptoms of mental illness while the latter mostly had records of trouble with the law and didn't necessarily receive disability checks. Social Services could be generous for a while but for others he worried about the consequences of being pushed back into the unforgiving outside world.

Himself, David had schizophrenia and a growing history of troubles because of it. Graduate school and trying to join the Army made his situation distinctly different than many of the others. His situation was about the drama of finding a living situation and wondering if he would ever be productive in some way again. His experiences only made him even more apprehensive for his housemates because social workers and counselors had tried to fit him into situations where he wasn't a real fit. That was the real paradox of situations like this. People with problems needed what seemed like endless

accommodation to try and be healthy and productive, but socially challenged situations only had very finite and limited opportunities. To David it was like the same old problems as the unsubsidized world. People just refused to recognize that some people were just more sensitive and couldn't be pushed around to be productive.

As David sat and thought, two of his housemates noisily came into the kitchen. One was a short, sturdily built man of a little over 30 with a facial tick and nearly the worst personal habits in the house who came straight into the kitchen and opened up the refrigerator door to look and see what was available to eat. This was Joe, who paused a moment with the door open until he immediately grabbed a package of hot dogs and went over to the microwave where he placed two hot dogs on a plate and turned them on to cook. The other was a dark-haired, medium-built talkative guy, also about 30 who followed them in from outside and went over to the coffee maker where he poured a glass (there were few coffee cups available in the cupboard). This was Bode, who except for his chain smoking menthol cigarettes and drinking coffee sweet enough to be dessert dish was among the more functional members of the house. The two were talking as they came in, ignoring David at first.

"I drank three beers and smoked two joints for my birthday," Joe said. He announced his news, sort of elated, to anyone within earshot. Drinking and drugs were sort of an adolescent identity issue with him, and

he didn't seem to really grasp that they were against the rules. Technically they were only against the rules to use at the house and apparently Joe had been at some other location. He took full advantage of this loophole when he had the money and his disability check was doled out to him in very small amounts for this reason. "It was a party," he continued, waiting for his hot dogs to cook.

"You shouldn't brag about that, spending all your money on drugs isn't a good idea. You should sober up Joe."

Bode sat down at the table with David. "What's up Dave?"

David winced a little at the colloquial version of his name. He had a thing about keeping things formal. "Not too much I guess. Sounds like you've been having a good time Joe."

"Yeah, had a birthday party over at Ed's house. Ed is my cousin."

"Well that's good I guess," said David who was always a little distant with Joe, whom he considered someone incorrigible.

Bode stopped a minute with his coffee before he went back outside to smoke. "Reminds me of this birthday I had once. This girl came back to my apartment and we were drinking some beers. After a few beers she took off her shirt and whoop-dee-doo I got lucky!" David felt a little out of place but it wasn't uncommon at the bachelor house for the guys to be somewhat crude and

inappropriate. It was one of the things that made David realize how desperate his situation was. He had long ago felt like he had left behind adolescent male shortcomings like kissing and telling or bragging about something as mundane as drinking, but here he was listening to these guys and there was not much to do about it.

The microwave ended its cycle in Joe got up to get his hot dogs. He fixed them up and ate in semisilence, smacking his lips loudly when he was done. As he got up to leave the kitchen he put his fist out to offer David a fist pump in salute. David reluctantly returned the gesture, noting once again Joe's tattooed knuckles. The big thing, David sort of thought to himself as Joe and Bode left the kitchen was just to wait it out. Things had to get better somehow. He just couldn't believe how things were working out. David's housemates were nice enough guys, but they were sort of dead-enders without too much sense of responsibility. No matter how far David's status sank he usually maintained a nagging sense of responsibility. Bode wanted to write jokes for TV, and he noted he was fairly active although he had a bad back. No matter how old David got, other people's ambitions always intrigued him. He was especially interested in in writing ambitions. Bode talked about going to college but it seemed doubtful that he would invest in something like that. It made David feel very privileged and more sensitive than ever to the way educational privileges were rationed. To him it seemed hardly like a real society to leave people out of something as obviously constructive as education.

David wanted to be a writer too and someday he dreamed of writing stories and novels. He had tried to write lots of things since he was a teenager and he had learned a lot about writing. Most of all what he learned was that it took time to write and circumstances to write were hard to come by. These days he had a lot of time, living at Allen Avenue. But somehow he didn't have the circumstances for the mindset. He had tried working on a journal to write about his recent hospital stay, but it didn't really work out. He was sort of like Goldilocks and he just didn't feel secure enough settled in his room with a notebook.

He decided to leave the kitchen, which was deserted again and he got up from a seat at the table. Before going he cleared a couple of dirty dishes and put them in the sink to be washed and threw away some trash that had been left on the table. The house had two floors and the kitchen was at the back of the house on the first floor. In front was the TV room and down at the other end of the house there were two offices for the house director and the house counselors. In the middle of the front was the front door and the stairway leading up to the second floor which was all bedrooms and two bathrooms with showers. The house had been built specifically to be a group home and coincidentally David remembered being told about it when he was first looking for a living situation locally as a mental patient years before. It was newly built the social worker said and there was independent housing nearby, also run by Welcome House.

After he cleared the table, David went to the front stairs and up to his room which was at the West end of the house at the back. In his room David sat down and leaned against the wall next to the bed. He put his feet up until he was sitting on the bed with his back against the wall. There were no chairs in his room which was bare except for an old sideboard along one side of the room. It had drawers which he didn't really use and looked like its faux wood grain finish had been adopted from a living room or something like that. David kept a few stray papers and a pile of loose change and his cell phone on it. He had no belongings to speak of except for a few ill-fitting items of clothing which he kept in the closet on the other side of the room. Except for these things the room was just a bare expanse of old carpet with nothing in it. David had extraordinary patience and he usually just sat and passed the time like this, isolated from the rest of the house.

He reflected on his personal philosophy, which was sort of materialistic in many ways. He kept going over the way people's activity was constantly obsessed with propping up the value of money. Many people thought of money as something people just swap to keep things fair economically but David tended to focus on the way things were persistently unfair. There was such a surplus of money that was concentrated in private hands that people hardly thought about money as being evenly swapped around so people could live. Instead he thought about how money trickled down from the wealthy to the less wealthy or outright poor in the service of maintaining the same order of things. Money

was power and power vigorously flowed to its possessors.

When you thought about it like this, David thought, you realized that if people weren't so paranoid about conserving order that the wealthy would accept substitutes for drudgery and profit sacrificed at the altars of their investments. They was such a frantic demand that money create money among the middle and lower classes. This was also true among the extravagantly wealthy but with power came other forms of wisdom. It was possible for wealth to see that it took more than cash to make things go around. It took virtue and cooperation and all the things that make people get along better than just the coercion of efficiency and profitability.

This was where David fit in. He was constantly trying to form a rationale for his obsessions. The things he cared about were like what other people cared about, but he was more idealistic. He wanted to be able to produce creative products as his contribution to the world, but even as a mentally ill person with all his time to himself, he didn't really find very fecund circumstances for that. His obsession was wondering if it was him or the world around him that caused it. What he thought about was the way that many idealistic virtues that could be created were desirable but got thoroughly trampled in the workaday world that, in its frenzy, didn't value them. Only the rarified world of comfort and wealth even began to value creativity for its own sake.

A better world took time and David often thought of an analogy from when he was growing up. He grew up on an old farm and once upon a time there was a tractor that was stuck in the mud. People were frantically trying to get the tractor going again so it could pull its trailer. Some people heaved and pulled and pushed on the tractor all the way back at the rear of the trailer but it didn't budge. What had to happen was that people had to slow down and rest so that they could have a plan. Eventually it was sheer exhaustion that slowed them down. They all had to unhitch the trailer and then hitch a rope to the tractor in the mud so they could all pull together.

After they pulled together and got the tractor out of the mud they had to use the rope so that the tractor could pull the trailer from a short distance away at a dry spot. Eventually, with time and patience and coordination both the tractor and the trailer were retrieved from the mud. David felt that economics was like that. The solution to getting and keeping things out of the mud wasn't brute pulling power alone but rather time and patience so people didn't get swallowed up by the mud. Economies could do that but they tended to muddy people's clothes and neglect caring for people's emotional and intellectual development. It was one thing to have food but if you were unhappy and unbalanced you might not continue like that for very long. David wondered what was unbalanced about himself. Somehow he went through the motions of daily life at the house but he wasn't very productive. The house wasn't really a very chaotic environment. In fact

he was sort of grateful for the general quiet a lot of the time, with big exceptions for loud music in the middle of the night. But somehow David didn't really fit in and socialized little. He sort of observed from a distance.

As he sat there was a knock at the door. He guessed it was a staff member because the other residents never knocked on his door. He was right, and when he opened the door it was Albert, who was the social worker who was sometimes in the house.

“Hi Dave, I have some news about Danforth street. We can go to visit and meet the other residents there soon.”

“Oh thanks, that's good,” David replied and then Albert was gone as quickly as he had come. David closed the door and went back to sitting on his bed. Albert had been involved in helping David find permanent housing. It was a difficult challenge and eventually David had backed off looking for an apartment and had settled for switching houses to another Welcome House home. He didn't have too many details about the new home but he knew the location was nearer to where he wanted to be.

Albert said the level of care and Independence would be more appropriate for him at Danforth Street.

Allen Avenue was a transitional house with the highest level of care for men who were coming out of hospital or prison or homelessness and David was demonstrating that he didn't have an immediate need for that much intervention.

David had worked with another social worker for a while to find an apartment but he wasn't very enthusiastic about it and the social worker was very inexperienced which made a difficult job nearly impossible. Housing was a terrific problem for people in the house. For some, too much independence was a bad thing and they lapsed into drinking and smoking. Still others had poor housing records that they carried with them into new situations. And all this would have been enough to contend with even if there weren't already problems with the housing system.

There were a variety of arrangements that people used but generally it was a temporary voucher system. The voucher system was somewhat advantageous to landlords and in a renter's market it helped them rent their worst properties and properties that were run down and had chronic maintenance issues. But in a market where housing was scarce it left voucher holders out in the cold in that landlords discriminated against people with vouchers because people with vouchers could only rent the properties with the lowest rents and landlords could control who they rented to by setting the rent within voucher limits or not. All this made it very difficult for voucher holders to find units that were available to them and singled them out to reluctant landlords who didn't return their calls or missed appointments to show properties.

To add to the problems that subsidies brought, inexperienced social workers had little sense of all these difficulties as well as the nuances of finding an

apartment that was suitable. To them it was about finding anything that was available and this often led to problems down the road. The reason David had gone to the hospital the last time which eventually brought him to Allen Avenue and searching for housing again was that the housing he had found years before through this process had gotten so run down and infested with bugs that it precipitated a crisis and David couldn't live there anymore. The apartment had been okay to view and rent for the first year or two but for a long-term arrangement it had big problems.

David found the same kind of problems with the system when he was searching for the second time around. In his opinion mentally ill people and people with all sorts of housing problems needed properties that were maintained and had professional support in addition to just having vouchers to help with the rent. He thought about how things were going and it frustrated and made him feel like housing was more of a challenge that he could handle. Instead he just tried to keep his enthusiasm up for dealing with Albert's plan and tried to look forward to a change.

He sat and stared at the wall for a while and then out the window. The wall was painted pale yellow and he listened to the ticking of his mechanical watch on the sideboard next to the bed while he sat. He felt a little restless but told himself to stay calm because what he needed more than anything right now was patience. Neither frantic activity nor ingenuity alone were going

to solve his problems in his present predicament. It seemed like you could never have enough patience.

Somehow that was how he functioned best and it was different from many people. He was sort of manic and frustrated from lots of activity but his head began to clear and he could think with calm. Out the window across the small backyard there was a thicket. In the mornings it was full of songbirds and he welcomed their pleasant sounds but now in the afternoon there were no sounds except the traffic around 100 yards away off to one end of the house. The road was pretty busy and David admired how the road was built on a short side street that offered some protection from the sounds in a patch of forest. The window that he could see out from his bed faced into the woods and at the time in late Winter he could see across the big bog beneath the trees to another building about the 500 yards away. It was an apartment and there was a large parking lot surrounding the building.

As he watched cars drove up and parked along the border of trees that he could see through. That was another big obstacle in housing. Cars. As he thought he was amazed at how many people supported cars and how far they could live from the bus line. All his life David had lived in urban areas and tried to stay within walking distance of grocery stores and laundromats and other necessities. Living was so complicated he thought, although his life was relatively simple compared to many others. He remembered he was hungry and

suppressed the impulse to go back downstairs and look in the kitchen again.

2.

### Take Your Pills

One day in March David was getting up in the morning and had taken a shower for the day when he thought he heard a sort of ruckus downstairs. In the mornings, after showering David always went downstairs to get his medication from the counselors in the office then he went to the kitchen to make himself some breakfast. Today he was up early as usual before all the other occupants in the house, at least so he thought, and he got dressed and went downstairs as usual. As he approached the office though he found a very different scene than expected.

David stopped in the hallway when he realized there was someone in the office with Rory who sounded terribly upset. He didn't know who it was but he decided to wait on asking for his meds and go to the kitchen. "I

just feel terrible, man. I think I'm going to hurt myself," David heard the sounds coming from the office.

"Just sit tight, I'm going to call for some help, okay," came Rory's voice, catching the note of alarm from the first person. Rory was like that, always equal to the drama that he was presented with and sometimes the house cooked up some pretty big drama. David stood awkwardly still in the kitchen, alone again and listening, feeling like an intruder but knowing there was no place else to go to respect anybody's privacy.

"I just can't take it anymore. I feel awful," David heard the voice again and thought he could identify it now. It sounded like Peter Sanchez, one of the other occupants of the house. He was younger than everyone else in the house and already had an eventful life of trouble behind him. The voice was manic, sobbing, and David guessed Peter had been up all night as he did sometimes, to play rap music. David hardly remembered the middle of the night before when he had been awakened about 2AM by the throbbing lyric "Going down for reeeeeeeal," repeated over and over at the top volume. The night counselor had not come up to tell anyone to turn it down because no one complained. It was sort of an unspoken code of the house that people tolerated each other's quirks or things they did to get through bad times like play loud music. The music had been catchy but edgy to the point of being offensive. David had never looked up the lyrics and couldn't make out the words except for the chorus which he imagined was about committing violent crime or getting arrested.

David just covered his ears with the pillow and put his ticking watch close up to his ears to distract from the loud offensiveness and what he considered inappropriateness. David really wasn't that much of a prude he thought but the extremes of the house jolted him into an awareness of other people's youth that he found disquieting.

"Everything is just going wrong. My life is a nightmare," David heard from the office before he next heard a firm knock on the front door. The knock was audible down the hall and soon he heard Rory.

"I've got to get that. Just take your pill and sit there where you are," Rory said. "Hi thanks for coming," David heard him say and soon the hallway was full of a line of uniformed paramedics and police officers and David's anxiety went through the roof. David had his share of experience with police and paramedics and first thing in the morning he was more than a little overwhelmed at the visit. The Allen Avenue house was usually quiet and orderly if there was no music playing or some similarly strident disruption and at first David didn't know what to do as he stood there in the kitchen. He decided to sit down quietly and wait. The police and paramedics, there were about five people in all, wore rubber gloves and tried to be calm in the serious way that police do when they are waiting for their partners to assess the situation they are responding to. The office at the end of the house was small, only large enough to fit about two people comfortably so only the first police officer and paramedic went in to talk to Peter and the rest

waited in the hall. David couldn't really see or hear them all with all the people there. He just tried to look innocent and watched as some of the cops came and went. He remembered that there was a kitchen knife left in the drawer; sometimes they were kept in the office for safety, and David just made a mental note to himself not to go near it. When cops were around, David thought like a cop and remembered things like that for his own safety.

Soon a paramedic came out, leading Peter by his elbow, not in handcuffs or anything, and Peter looked semi-calm like he had been through this drill before. The whole contingent followed them out to the ambulance in the front yard and David got up to go in the front room and watch out the window as Peter climbed in the back and the paramedics followed him and closed the door. They didn't blast the sirens as they drove off with just lights flashing.

Peter was having a bad day, David thought as he went back to the kitchen and paused a few moments before all the confusion settled again and the house was quiet and empty the way it usually was in the morning. To David, interruptions like this in the house, which happened fairly regularly, left his skin creepy and crawling. David felt the preliminary stages of his illness fairly easily and all it took really was a little interruption to disrupt his well-being. After a little while he decided it was okay to go down the hall to the office where Rory was still straightening up after the events that had taken place.

“Pete is having a bad day,” Rory said to David when he appeared in the door. Rory was an older man too, maybe a little bit older than David and David remembered that Rory had talked about the place he lived out in Buxton near David's childhood home. When Rory heard that David had lived out in that neighborhood Rory mentioned that he used to go hunting near there and David remembered too that hunters and fishermen would park their trucks near his house and do their thing down along the river that ran near his house. Rory had a pickup truck and his brother was a cop and he had been a home counselor with Welcome House for decades. David thought he did a good job as a counselor and was glad that he was on that day. Rory was sort of an ex-construction-worker-outdoorsman type and he was a little subdued when David said he had tried to be a teacher.

“Can I get my meds,” he asked and Rory pushed his chair back and went over to the cabinet where they kept the pharmaceuticals for the house. “And can I get an Ativan for anxiety today? It looks like it will be a long one. I hope everything turns out okay for peter. David had a supply of special meds that he could request for anxiety and he took one once in a while. They helped a little if things were calm. Rory counted out his two pills for the day and the Ativan and handed David a small cup containing them.

“Want some water,” Rory asked.

“Okay,” David replied and took a small cup of water to swallow the pills with. After taking the pills David was

glad everything seemed okay with Rory and went back out to the kitchen to make breakfast. He cooked bacon and two eggs and some toast and was glad to eat in the morning as he always was. He didn't eat much in the house, just breakfast, and he was losing a little weight after his time in the hospital but he was glad for the regularity. Annie always stocked bacon and eggs for breakfast in the refrigerator, although David was the only person who ate breakfast regularly. After breakfast and all the excitement David went upstairs and sat on his bed again to think. He thought about Peter for a while. Peter was about 20 and he was a refugee from the corrections system. From what he knew Peter had been locked up in a juvenile detention center for years for something he claimed he didn't do. David believed him because he had always been a little skeptical of the law and the courts figuring out the facts accurately in emotion charged cases although he was a little less skeptical of the legal system in figuring out what was generally appropriate to do in cases. What he meant was that it seemed likely to him from what he knew that Peter was generally in trouble; he was violent from time to time and admitted to having tried things like heroin. But he was also not the type that David would have considered a person to cause trouble. He seemed like a relatively hapless victim most of the time who made habitually bad choices. A lot of people were trying to help him and it kind of tugged on David to try and pitch-in too but he generally kept his advice and attention to himself. He was friendly, but he reminded himself that he thought it was proper etiquette in a group home to

remember your own problems first. Peter had a stepmother who came in to see him regularly and a dedicated young woman who was his social worker.

It was the social worker who caught David's imagination. He was sort of awed at the challenge Peter presented and tried to imagine just what would be a good course of life for Peter. People hoped he would get a job and settle down but David worried that this was too simplistic. Peter seem like someone who wanted more than that. Peter was curious and sensitive in unexplained ways that David suspected were a product of the criminal justice system. The system was surely cold and controlling but David imagined that they were some fairly caring role models in the Juvenile Justice System. And desperation of course made people very impressionable, sort of softened them up David thought.

As he sat and thought David began to remember his own experiences as a teenager and they made him fear even more for Peter. David had gone to a sort of magnet school for privileged students but the experience of living away from home had introduced to him to a lot of delinquent things sort of early, and he suspended his judgment about how much of an advantage extra school had given him. He wished he could write about his youth because he sort of found that writing lightened his sense of burden from things and it required a lot of careful focused thought. His thoughts were generally difficult lately and ever since he had become ill, and he no longer went to extremely odd

physical lengths to clear his head. He had suddenly and literally started to “put his foot down” to try to insist that conversations be more clear and direct to him. He grabbed the floor with his feet, arched his back, and talked in a high, squeaking voice, pausing a long time before responding to other people. It was eventually identified as extreme illness although from David's point of view he was just doing everything you could to clear his head, regardless of what others thought. His medication, the injection he got every few months seemed to lessen his urge to do the symptoms but David still sometimes resorted to turning his hands to an upward position when he was alone because it gave him the same sort of exhilaration he felt when he was ill.

He turned his left hand upward and sat sort of meditatively for a while to help himself think. His journal was on the sideboard next to the bed and he picked it up with his right hand, opening it in his lap and holding down the pages with his left hand turned backwards. He didn't know if it was the Ativan kicking in or just what it was but he suddenly felt like trying to write through his discouragement. A beginning scene came to him from recent years living on his own.

### Journal

Psychiatric lockdown was different from jail in a lot of ways I thought. The biggest difference was that in psychiatric lockdown the premise was that you needed help and should receive some sympathy. I think this is the key to all assisted situations that is widely neglected. Corrections officials, therapists, nurses,

social workers all often seem to have a concern that the inmate or patient won't be given enough discipline somehow to ensure changes in behavior. I think they have an impulse to be authoritarian when often this is exactly what triggers people to rebel. It can't be emphasized enough that what people in distress need is nurturing. There's so little recognition of how difficult the common world is. People underestimate what it takes to be a common person. Make the sandwiches, do the dishes, clean the toilets all become urgent, pressing imperatives from the perspective of people trying to assist people with problems. It's like they don't apprehend how complex a person is really and realize that creativity and nurturing is often just as basic to their personal needs. There are so many obstacles to apprehending a person and somehow priorities get rearranged.

It's not like people don't care. I wouldn't accuse them of that, but people's definition of a person often falls short when they are confronted by anomalous behavior. People need to be able to see themselves as being valuable and doing common work is not the only way people assess their own value. Words spoken, pictures made, music made, all these things are important to identity and difficult to accomplish, especially the motivation.

The fact is you can't really have a caring enough environment to completely accomplish special identities for all people all the time. It's that difficult. People just seem to settle for what happens to them

although all people need to act like aristocrats of themselves and be treated like aristocrats too. Strangely, when birth is the criteria for special treatment, people accept that sometimes strangeness or madness or anger seems to become a prominent part of a person, but when doing well in school intellectually becomes paramount, people are absurdly cold and calculating about how much identity itself will matter to a person. Smart people will need to be pandered to and nurtured but less smart people need to accept being cogs in a social machine. It's terrifically discouraging.

I am reminded of the times that I have revisited visited my school days at Whitfield School and how these memories of special attention and privilege didn't really distinguish all the recipients very much. People still became drug addicts, drunks and criminals despite being surrounded by extra social padding in that part of their lives. "All men are created equal, but some have investments" seems to begin to sum up some of the differences. I remember thinking about the last time I visited Whitfield.

I was working as a moving truck washer and inspector a few years back, after I was diagnosed ill and before my life completely fell apart again in the in the aughts. I was trying to get off disability and had repressed my dreams of writing and tried to fully embrace a very humble day-to-day existence where I worked a simple day job to pay my own bills. Things weren't going all that well. I spent all my free time trying to meet women and I drank. I was trying to completely part ways with my previous life as

a graduate teaching assistant, the apogee of my humble intellectual career but something alien enough to my working class beginnings to make a big impression of me. I hit on women in bars some but I mostly went to cafes which were a lower budget approach. I couldn't afford to buy anyone drinks but myself. In many ways I was like a teenager again in my late 30s. I had reached a sort of mid-life crisis, tall gangly but not very athletic or good looking; poor, mentally ill and trying to ignore it, all coming together as a sort of loser coffee-house rogue who is trying to get it by on the strength of their limited personality. Needless to say, my attempts were generally futile and I had no girlfriend to speak of.

I plodded through long days washing and inspecting rental trucks for the EZ move company. Each truck was cleaned and checked over when it came back from a rental and I worked in the garage where I paced myself all day sort of independently on the rental lot. I was glad for the general independence of the work but it was mind-numbingly dull. Sometimes my boss would give me rides to other garages to pick up and return trucks or drive trucks to other maintenance garages and one day he came out to the area where I washed the trucks and told me he had an errand for me. This is about mid-morning.

"I've got a trip for you," he said. "There's a truck parked over behind the building that has to go down to New Hampshire. It's got a problem with the automatic transmission, but it should make it all right. Take these keys and drive it down today. There's another truck

down there for you to pick up and drive back. You should be able to make it back before quitting time."

I accepted the assignment, glad to get off out of the garage for the day, and I didn't think much about it as I retrieved my brown bag lunch from my backpack, a Spam sandwich and some corn chips, and got my jacket to go find the truck. Once there I got in and started it up, heading for the highway with a map from the glove compartment to guide me to the other garage location. Looking at the map I noticed that I would be passing by Whitfield about lunch time and thought little of it except to remember the sheen of nostalgia that I always thought of when I thought of Whitfield. The highway was engaging but dull as the miles passed going South from Portland. I listened to the radio as far as the reception went but soon found myself searching for new local stations as I approached New Hampshire. As usual in those days, when things focused my mind, I thought about meeting women. Then the idea popped into my head of visiting Whitfield.

I hadn't been back to Whitfield since long before in my days as a teenager and I had thought a lot about the place during my travels in graduate school and college and then afterwards in a mental hospital. It felt deeply ironic to visit in my working class clothes in my rental truck after all the pomp and circumstance that had gone with going there. The place had a dress code and everyone wore suit jackets and ties to class. It had given me a bizarre image of what my future would be like back in the days when I was there. I considered it a foregone

conclusion that I would grow up to be a comfortable, tweed- wearing professional adult and I hadn't accepted the reality of my shortfall very well in college. Indeed I lost my mind for a few years.

As I drove I realized I could stop by Whitfield for lunch and maybe flirt with the cashier at some cafe. There was a cafe near the old boathouse and it occurred to me that I could go there. So I took the Whitfield exit when it came and wound my way through roads I remembered from long before to make it to the old town of Whitfield. I was wearing my EZ move shirt and cap and the black pants I was required to wear for work. I had work boots and a short blue Dickies jacket that I usually wore around work. I would stick out like a sore thumb on campus at Whitfield but it occurred to me that the school year had ended for Whitfield and there would be no students around. I was relieved in a big way and thought that a deserted campus would make my trip more enjoyable.

Driving around the streets of Whitfield was strange; I never had a car when I was there. It was even more strange driving the wide, awkward moving truck around. I just perked up and drove alertly until I made it to a parking lot down along the river which was full except for one narrow spot on a weekday in May. I pulled in and parked, then got out with my lunch in my pocket. I would get myself a water at the cafe and then take a walk on campus. There used to be plenty of benches to stop and eat your lunch on. I felt an immediate rush of memories just being there, and

suddenly I was surrounded by the sense of how much had changed in my life since those days.

The Boathouse was next to the lot where I parked and I soon found myself standing by the water and overlooking the docks where once I had been a sort of would-be athlete working out on the water in my awkward youthful way and dreaming of amateur glory. In those days decades before I lived in a sort of bubble of unrealistic dreams that if I just worked out a lot I would get into a famous college and maybe make it to the Olympics or something. I had a history of being delusional, really.

There were no rowers at the boathouse today since school was not in session so I was at leisure to check out the old place. It was different really and I realized the old building had been replaced with an efficient new one. The old building had been filled with old boats and exercise equipment and I remember the pictures on the wall of teams from 100 years before looking sporting from an entirely different place and time. I wondered if they still had the pictures on the walls inside or if the old boats still sat in their racks along the bays with their doors facing out towards the water.

It seemed like sports carried me along for a while when I was in school at Whitfield. The exhilaration and stress relief of working out sort of buoyed me over the bar in a sense and I probably wouldn't have managed as well without them. At heart I was a spaz headed for a spaz life and all the advanced opportunities of schools were sort of wishful thinking on the part of adults who

encountered me. I had my real dream, which was becoming a writer, but I think my mentors focused a lot more on the conservative fantasies I flirted with at the beginning of high school. On my learning to follow stocks' price earnings ratios my former investment banker Latin teacher in public school was intrigued. I was going to a small public school with limited opportunities, and a few teachers at my high school, or just one really, were always encouraging students to try and get ahead as foreign exchange students or going to college early.

I was full of enthusiasm because I had read a book by a Whitfield alumnus who wrote about two students, one of them was obsessed with joining the Army, and some events that took place in Summer school. The book had affected me as some books often did and my imagination was filled with thoughts of an idealistic future with a sort of pastoral setting. I was more enthused by the thought of boarding school as a setting for my life than anything else really. In those days joining the Army was just another remote possibility for life and none of the gruesome ethical monstrosities that might occur to someone who is actually contemplating it had to come into my mind.

I had applied to Whitfield reveling in the extra attention and brimming with enthusiasm for a new life, my old one suddenly seeming distinctly unsatisfactory. As a young person, too, I was full of a sense of enhancing my sexual prospects as much as possible and imagined myself dressed better and glowing with athletic health

as I tried to impress imaginary members of the opposite sex with my future success. I was a virgin of course but my mind kept wondering back to sex in undistracted moments and in a convoluted, desperate sort of way I tried to appropriate a world of healthy optimism that was in many ways beyond my reach.

What I wanted was confidence, and I had written to my Latin teacher mentor in search of advice to get a girlfriend. He had awkwardly advised me to be patient, but my naivete wasn't very encouraged. Flirting with girls in those days before Whitfield was like waiting to sit next to attractive girls in class and it was an excruciatingly slow and frustrating sort of process. There was one especially attractive girl I sat next to in Latin class who was the object of my particular dreams. She chatted with the affable Latin teacher about her siblings, who were numerous, and she never seemed to pay any special attention to me. What I felt I needed to happen was that I become more athletic because she was a very enthusiastic athlete but I was always a clumsy excuse for that.

Adults assigned so much innocence to childhood that the sense of gritty guilt that goes with thinking about sex for many young people is often nudged aside and ignored. I think it is this repression that drives so much of the contained energy of young people and older people too, with their focus on the frantic sense of responsibility and drive to productivity. Nothing keeps young people in motion like youthful sexual energy and the pressure of adults to defer this results in a lot of

youthful achievement that might not happen if people lived and grew up in a paradisaical state. Life would be discovered in a sort of inevitable casual way that would engender few of the rarified anxieties of modern childhood.

Sometimes I think that even sexual violence would have little energy and sexual competition would be transparent with the renewal of the social goals and pressures that go with coupling. Optimism just bowled me over in youth. I drifted back and forth from the unbridled hopes of a hardcore gambler to suicidal despair at other times. Sometimes I couldn't imagine living past the age of 20 I was so discouraged. It was sex, in particular, that drove these unrealistic cycles, sometimes accompanying unbridled optimism and at other times its absence seeming like an overwhelming lack in my life. It was intimacy as well that I felt as a sort of lack in my life. I had friends at Whitfield but there was always a distance driven by rival ambitions and I found myself not very prepared to maintain myself as an adult.

Whitfield was a complex, busy place and I tried to grow a lot there. It was a place to nurture adult ambitions but my life wasn't free enough of material concerns to be only concerned with the pressure of ambition. Thinking back looking out over the boathouse at Whitfield, dressed in my blue collar clothes and struggling to find a way to assemble a workable life after my ambitions had failed, I felt an enormous sense of letdown from exhausted hopes and difficult experiences that still plagued me even at 40 years old.

### 3.

#### Do You Feel Like Hurting Yourself Or Others?

Peter Sanchez bent his squat wrestlers frame and twisted around to find a seat in the back of the cramped ambulance. It was not the first time he had been in the back of an ambulance in his 20-year-old life but it was the first time in the year since he had been living at Allen Avenue. He wasn't enthusiastic for all the attention as the paramedics squeezed in after occupying the bench next to him and then across from him on the other side.

"So you have been feeling bad all night," one of the paramedics asked, also not a very large man, about medium height and fit. Sanchez knew the drill and just nodded. These guys would be gone after the ride to the hospital and then he would have to talk to nurses and doctors. He felt a little panic like he had shared with Rory at the house and he definitely didn't like the way he was feeling, but all the ruckus usually seemed like it

was a bit much on these trips. There were all kinds of simple questions during the awkward waiting. He didn't know if he would hurt himself like he told Rory but he knew he definitely felt bad. Sometimes, often he had to admit, he felt like he could just see no way forward. The boredom of his life at the house combined with the restless frustration of writing songs or tinkering with the commonplace electronics he collected and took apart sometimes to see how they worked, and he just started feeling like he couldn't go on. There was no sense bawling anymore although he had cried freely in the office with Rory.

"I just can't take my life anymore," he said and hung his head. "It's been a while now since I was in jail but it just haunts me. I didn't even do it and they kept me in jail for 4 years. My mother's in jail. I got a letter from her the other day. She writes to me once in awhile. My brother is in the Marines but I can't do that because I have a record. Stuff just gets to me."

"Just take it easy. Everything will be okay," the second paramedic said when there was an awkward silence.

Peter had an odd sense of security as he rode on the road to the hospital in this odd space in between the routine of everyday life and all out crisis. It seemed to him like his whole life somehow took place in that space. There was just no complacency or copacetic comfort to fall into that kept most people going. Most people exerted themselves or experienced the minor ups and downs of normal emotional life from a place where comfort and security were just a couple of deep

breaths away. For Peter it seemed like he was always just going through the motions and real security was always elusive. When he was growing up he had tried to rely on himself from a young age. He was more than often in trouble and he had no father. There was a foster home for a few years when he was eight or nine and he kept in touch with his his foster parents but somehow it wasn't the same. He could relate to his mother but had long ago learned not to depend on her. It was his older brother who took care of him most it seemed.

His brother was a couple of years older and he was the more responsible of the two boys. He was technically his half brother because he had a different father but that didn't really matter to the two. Growing up in Arizona have been difficult. When he would get into fights on the schoolyard his brother had always been there to back him up. To Peter, fighting was just something you did, and he took pride in being a successful fighter and a very tough guy. Getting in trouble for fighting didn't bother him. It just seemed like a badge of glory that went along with being able to win all the fights he got into with people his own size. It was his sort of security really, being able to depend on himself in a fight.

The loud noise of the ambulance engine revved and diminished as they made their way to the hospital. Peter was glad they were going to the hospital and not to jail though he already had the impulse to want to just leave and forget about it and he knew even the hospital

wouldn't let him do that, at least not at first. He tried to prepare himself a little for what was coming. There would be the emergency room first and people asking if he had thoughts of hurting himself. He would be honest and tell them that he had been feeling that way but he was feeling a little better. He didn't know how long it would be in the emergency room. There would probably be a lot of waiting. There always was.

The hospital would also probably want to know about his medication. He still took Klonopin for anxiety after his last trip to the hospital before he came to Allen Avenue. He had been in a sort of halfway group home after getting out of Long Creek Juvenile Detention Center but soon after he got there people thought he would do better at Welcome House. As he sat and rode in the ambulance it occurred to Peter to reflect that he did like Allen Avenue better than the other place and he was a little glad of that.

Soon the ambulance was heading up to the emergency room entrance at Maine Medical Center. He braced himself for what was to come next as the paramedics opened the rear door and helped him get out. He wasn't on a stretcher or anything so that was probably good. But that was the first thing out of the ambulance. They brought a stretcher out and asked him to climb on and sit on it. It was adjusted so he could sit up, and as they rolled him into an emergency room he felt a little sheepish atop it.

The emergency room was dim and gray and people immediately surrounded him where he sat on the

stretcher. He was a little intimidated by all the activity but took a deep breath and tried to respond. The way he felt was still pretty bad. His head was sort of buzzing like the beginning of a headache and his limbs felt heavy. He just didn't feel well really, not like he imagined most people must feel to undertake all the activity they do. Rory had been just coming in on his shift in the morning when he went downstairs. He said "good morning" and offered him a place to sit. Rory had his coffee and he was almost bouncing off the walls with enthusiasm it seemed at first.

Then when Rory saw Peter's drooping face and defeated posture he was immediately concerned. It was like oil flowing into water. They were in the same room together but they could have been on different planets because their moods and attitudes were so different. Peter was exhausted but he didn't know it yet and he was still sort of buzzing from his night awake. Rory had just gotten up and come into work to start his morning shift. It was a little similar with the emergency room Peter sensed.

Apparently they were always ready for anything but when someone shined a light in his eyes he was a little taken aback by their businesslike manner. He was temporary blinded by the light and then someone was asking him to follow their finger with his eyes and he did what they said.

"When was the last time you ate," a person asked.

"I don't know, last night I guess," Peter replied, trying to remember if he had dinner the night before. Meals were informal at the house and sometimes he skipped dinner if he wasn't that hungry or no one made dinner. Staff did a lot of the cooking but people could cook for themselves if they wanted to. Now that it came up, Peter realized that he was kind of hungry.

"Are you feeling like hurting yourself or others," the same person asked him. "How are you feeling now," the person continued.

Peter replied that he wasn't feeling very well but he didn't really want to hurt himself and the person who stood before him frowning seriously as they asked their questions suddenly turned away after his answer and another person took over the questioning.

"Have you taken any drugs recently," was the next question.

"Just Klonopin," Peter replied, trying to remember back to the last time he smoked Marijuana. "I smoked pot last week I think."

"How long ago did you take the Klonopin," was the next question.

"About a half hour ago, just before the paramedics came."

"Okay we're going to see if we can find a place for you to wait to see the doctor and be admitted. Just sit tight okay?" After their questions the crowd of people was gone as quickly as they had come and he was left alone

in the examining room for about 15 minutes. The fit-looking, efficient paramedics were gone now and Peter saw one of them walk by the room, headed back to his ambulance. They didn't seem to be much going on in the emergency room this morning and as he waited Peter felt hunger gnawing away in his stomach and he looked around at the equipment pushed back against the walls of the examining room. There were oxygen tanks and monitors and bins containing medication syringes all around and for a brief moment he was glad he wasn't injured. He'd been in emergency rooms before, mostly after fights, and he was glad they were no needles today.

Eventually he was helped off the stretcher and led down a busy hallway to a small room with glass windows on one side that people could see in and he could see out to a small desk with a guard. The room had a hospital bed that was adjusted so he could sit up and not long after he was closed in the room a nurse brought him a breakfast tray and he ate. He felt much better after eating and he was still not very sleepy as he sat waiting on the bed.

Time passed slowly. He just sat on the bed and watched through the window to where the guard was. There were no magazines and there was no TV or anything to watch. He briefly thought of the rap songs he had made up during the night but he didn't have his phone which was how he recorded them. The phone would lay down a track and he could record over it to make up new songs. That was how he made songs. He didn't write

anything down, instead he recorded everything on his phone. It was a good system he thought because it kind of reflected his life. You never heard of any other rapper who did this.

It didn't matter much that there was nothing to read in the waiting room. He wasn't much of a reader anyway. He mostly watched movies and tinkered with his sound equipment. That was what he had been doing all night. He had a big subwoofer speaker that he hooked up and listened to some songs on it. The other thing he did was play video games. These were somewhat entertaining when he wasn't working on songs and the flashing lights and sounds held his attention. He didn't get into the stories of the games that much because they didn't seem to have much to do with him, but he thought about his own story a lot because it was what he wrote songs about. There were no other people in the holding area except the guard who ignored him for the most part just checking through the window every hour. Two or three hours passed until it was almost noon and a young doctor came in and talked to him. He wasn't wearing a white coat and he was sort of casually but carefully dressed.

"How are you feeling," the doctor began.

Peter was starting to feel drowsy now that the excitement was passing and he hadn't slept for a while. He replied that he was feeling ok.

"Do you feel like you're hurting like hurting yourself or others," came the question again.

"No I don't feel like my like hurting myself anymore," Peter replied, "I'm sort of sleepy."

"Oh were you up late last night," the doctor asked.

"Yes I didn't go to bed I guess. I was just busy writing songs."

"Oh what kind of songs do you write?"

"I write rap songs. I record them on my phone. I don't write them down so the recording is the only copy."

"Have you ever tried to hurt yourself? "

"Once I was going to throw myself under a train, but I didn't at the last minute."

"How long ago was this," the doctor asked, looking concerned.

"That was back before I went to jail. I was 14 I think. I lived in Arizona with my mother. She had to go to jail again and I was worried."

"Okay well let's get you admitted, somebody will be around to take you upstairs."

Peter just felt drowsy now and couldn't think of anything more to say. The doctor left and a lunch tray came which he ate. After lunch he just laid on the bed and drifted off.

As he slept he had a dream. In his dream he was a rapper and he was talking to a girl backstage. It seemed like he was smoking pot or something because the dream was hazy. There were lots of foods and alcoholic drinks,

which he was never really interested in. One of his songs was playing in the background.

Don't know what to do, feel like such a fool, just keep crying about my life n'shit.

Don't know why I cry, cuz I really ain't shy, just keep crying about my life n'shit.

Big stuff going down, acting like a clown just being me is the pits.

In his dream he felt tired of the music like he was had heard it a million times before and he told the girl how he was feeling.

"Well you got to get your act together, you're a big star now. People depend on you," she said emphatically.

He didn't reply right away, he just thought how he only wanted to be himself and he had always thought being famous would be easier than being an ordinary person. "People just want stuff from me, I can't take it," he said.

People gonna keep on wanting stuff from you and you gotta do your best to give it to them. That's how people are. They always want something from you. People like your music. You can be proud of that and get strength from it."

"But to write my music I have to live low down. I have to keep chill. I can't do that on tour and stuff. Somebody told me I should exercise yesterday. I don't like to exercise. I've never exercised before. People are hassling me."

“you got to take care of yourself so you can keep doing shows. Hip hop needs you to take yourself seriously. You think I came out tonight without getting myself ready? I had to get clothes and makeup and take care of myself. You got to be on the ball if people are going to keep liking you.”

In his dream Peter just slumped and sulked some more. He liked being a star but being a performer was something he didn't sign up for. He never imagined he could feel embarrassed out on stage or that he wouldn't be able to write new songs. His manager came into the room who now had a green head like an alien. Even the girl reacted and thought it was weird as he woke up and remembered he was still at Maine Medical Center and that Rory had called an ambulance when he said he felt like hurting himself.

He didn't know how long he had been asleep but he felt refreshed a little as he rubbed his eyes and woke up slowly. The room was beginning to feel cramped. He looked out at the clock in the open area outside the room. It said 3PM and he wondered if he was going to get out of this room today. The guard was still outside and as he waited he took a deep breath to try and get calm. He was in the hospital again and it seemed like he would never get out of trouble. At 4PM some different paramedics wheeled a stretcher into the area outside his room.

"Are you ready," one of them asked and opened the door. Peter didn't say anything he just turned around and slid onto the stretcher after he came out of the

small room. The stretcher was propped so he could sit up again and he settled in for a ride wherever he was going. The paramedics wheeled him out through the emergency room doors and out to the back of a waiting ambulance. They opened the doors then slid the stretcher into the back. They had fastened the seatbelts on the stretcher and Peter was always impressed at how smoothly the legs and wheels of the stretcher went up as he went into the back. Another paramedic climbed into the back with him for a short ride to another hospital a couple of miles away.

This time the paramedics didn't say anything as they drove lurching and braking until they were there in just a couple of minutes. Once there it was the opposite routine again as the stretcher came out of the back and went through the doors at the new hospital. Inside they unstrapped him and said he could get off the stretcher and wait in a room near the doors. A nurse came by and said there was some paperwork to do. She started asking his name and age and for his insurance information.

He didn't know if he had insurance or anything but he knew the phone number of Allen Avenue so he told it to the nurse and she went out for a while apparently to call them and get the necessary information. When she got back she assured him that everything was all set and asked him to sign at the end of the papers. Next a young man who seemed to be about his age but was kind of a dork came in and awkwardly but sternly described the security measures he would have to comply with.

He had to give up his shoelaces and promise not to swear or be uncooperative in the hospital and soon the young man was gone and he was waiting alone again. It wasn't long before the young man came back and led him down the hall to the elevator which they took to an upstairs ward. The halls with rooms stretched out away from a central desk where the halls met in the middle of the building and Peter looked at the desk at which was sitting a large nurse.

After waiting just a moment the nurse got up and said they would go down to his room. The room was at the end of that long hallway and there were two beds in the room, one of which was occupied by a man with an injured hand. The man was older, middle-aged maybe, and he didn't say anything. The man just rolled over and faced the wall as the nurse showed him to the bed where he could lie down and then quickly left to go back to the desk. Hospitals were so full of waiting he thought as he lay down on the bed and put his hands behind his head. He felt better now and part of him wished there hadn't been so much attention paid to his difficulties that day but that was the way it always was with adults and authorities flying off the handle to pay attention to him. They were sort of like a crisis family that would appear whenever there was trouble and go away just as quickly after things quieted down. He was glad the hospital was quiet, and soon after he lay down but he noticed people walking in the hall for exercise or out of boredom or something.

It wasn't long before dinner came and he was glad to eat again. He thought he would be more careful about eating regularly in the future because skipping meals got him down and however things turned out it would be best to avoid trouble. Maine Med was so imposing and if he was prone to being frightened he'd say frightening really but that really wasn't his point of view. Rory was so quick to call for assistance he thought. He was crying and feeling really badly that morning but by now at the end of the day he was a lot more subdued. He went to sleep on the bed wearing his clothes and slept soundly all night until early the next morning.

When he awoke he couldn't believe he was in the hospital at first. Then he remembered the day before and it all came back to him. The sun was coming up and he could see out the window to thoe parking lot which wasn't starting to fill up yet. He watched a few people pull up in cars dressed as cafeteria workers and he saw them walk towards the building. As he watched he remembered his own experience working at a pizza restaurant and the hours he spent there during the day making pizzas and doing some cleaning in the back. It wasn't that bad really as a work experience. He had worked there at the halfway house he went to after Long Creek and he had stayed six months before he quit because he wanted more time to stay home and work on his music. It was a conflict really that didn't go away. Whenever he worked he got material to write about but soon found that he got bored and restless and wanted to work on his own.

The counselors had been mad at him for quitting but that was when he had switched to living at Allen Avenue which was going better but he wasn't working at a traditional job, the only kind of job the counselors understood. The number of people increased in the parking lot as time passed and the sun rose higher in the sky.

The line from his song, "Big stuff going down..." kept going through his head and it depressed him just thinking about the day ahead. He wondered how long he would be locked up for. Hospitals were pretty much like jails he thought only the beds were a lot nicer. It was like they were just as committed to interference and control in your life but they felt obligated to be a little nicer about it. Hospitals were a lot more effective really.

Soon breakfast came and he ate and washed his face to sort of start out the day. The nurse who brought his breakfast said there was a Klonopin at the desk if he felt anxious and that he could bring his tray up when he was finished. He ate at one of the desks in the room by himself. He didn't know what happened to the other guy who disappeared around breakfast time.

There didn't seem to be any special routine in the hospital, no exercises or anything like that. He had been to hospitals before where each morning started with exercises and there was a community meeting each week. He laid back down in his bed to wait and see what would happen. Eventually around 10AM the nurse came down again and said the doctor was waiting to see him. He followed her back up to the desk and went into

a room with a table in it where the doctor was waiting. He was a young man carefully dressed with a folder sitting on the table in front of him. The doctor, who introduced himself as Dr Kratzer stood up a moment and gestured to a seat at the end of the table.

"How are you feeling today," he asked after Peter was awkwardly settled into the chair.

"I'm okay."

"Sounds like you were having a bad day yesterday. What was happening? Do you often feel bad?"

"Well I was talking to Rory when he came in for his shift yesterday morning and I was just feeling down about my life and everything and he decided to call the paramedics. Sometimes when I write songs I get down about my life."

"Oh so you write songs. What kind of songs do you write?"

"I make rap songs. I record them on my phone. I don't write them down so that's the only copy."

"How often do you feel like hurting yourself?"

"Not very often. Just once in awhile I feel like I will never get a place to live and have free time to make songs. The night before I talked to Rory I stayed up writing songs."

"You stayed up late?"

"Yes all night. I do that sometimes."

"Oh really. How did you sleep last night?"

"Do you often have trouble sleeping?"

"Not really, I just get carried away writing songs and keep at it all night. I've recorded 246 songs so far."

"Well that's quite a body of work. Do you feel anxious often?"

"Yes I feel anxious quite often. Rory gives me Klonopin when I ask for it. It helps a little bit."

"I guess we will keep you on the Klonopin so that will be available for you with the desk. Is there anything else you have questions about? Sounds like you're doing better."

"No I'm okay. I'm doing better."

"Try to get some rest now."

"Okay," he said and the doctor got up and showed him back to the door. He still didn't know how long he would be here but it seemed like things were going okay so he hoped it wouldn't be long. He went back down the hall to his room and laid out on his bed until lunch time.

4.

### Just Like Hitting The Hay

Peter lay on his bed after the meeting with the doctor. It didn't make that much of an impression on him really. It was just another meeting. As usual no one said anything about what was next or when he could go home. He let his mind drift and looked out the window some more.

Freedom was a relative thing he thought. He had gotten used to a complete lack of freedom in corrections as a teenager. It's like people's assumptions about what a person could be deprived of and still be a person were flawed. Everything was structured in juvenile corrections. There was a routine that was only interrupted by fights and unruliness. He had gotten into a fight once earlier on when he was 15. It was messed up in that it wasn't with someone he really disliked. They were about his size and no one had really won the

fight and it was broken up before it went very far. The guy, James had been in front of him in line for breakfast. He had been slow to move up when the line moved so Peter said something and James reacted stiffly. "You want to make something of it," he said. Peter said, "Yeah I do," and pushed him and then the fight was on, but it was a minor thing really, just enough to prove he would fight to defend himself if he had to. Peter had to spend the day in his cell after that and there was an interview with the therapist asking him about what had happened. The interview had been like his meeting with the doctor, kind of short and uneventful. He kind of missed going to meet with his tutor that day because he was a good student and he tried to do well in his school work. The students were mostly separated for their school work which was probably best because some students were more advanced than others and many associated school with frustration.

There were 50 or 60 other juveniles at Long Creek. Everybody had to go to school just like the outside. There was a school building and a gym and everyday people went to school from 8:05 in the morning until 3PM in the afternoon. Some people rebelled against school and didn't do any work. They were disciplined in the usual way with timeouts and other punishments.

Peter remembered some of the lessons which were pretty simple really. Reading was a big thing. They were always trying to get people to read books and he obliged them some by reading a book called "Rumble Fish" and doing a report on it. He didn't like writing much but he

did his assignments. There were a lot of books at the library and he picked that one out because it had a good cover. Math was hard in school. He found division especially difficult to crack and avoided doing his math homework. There weren't really a lot of assignments to do outside of class but sometimes there was reading to do independently. One thing that stuck in his mind was the lesson in government that he got. He would always remember that there were three branches of government. There was the judicial, the legislative, and the executive. It seemed kind of complicated to him but he took the judicial branch away in his memory because he already was having problems with it. He wondered what branch the hospital he was in fell under. Everything needed to be under the judicial branch to him because somebody was always cracking down and making him do things.

After lunch there was a community meeting that all the patients had to go to. The meeting was held in a large room and people sat around a table that filled the room. Apparently community meeting was held regularly once a week and everyone introduced themselves because they were always so many new people. When his turn to introduce himself came he said his name was Peter and then he was quiet again. There were a lot of strangers whom he had not seen in the halls of the hospital so far. There were people of all ages, about 20 of them, and except for a few people they seemed to be doing okay. Peter wondered if everyone was thinking about suicide or just him. It was probably just him and people each had their own problems he thought.

There was one girl who especially caught his attention. She was younger than him, maybe 16 or 17 and she was kind of spacey, kind of floating around and not really sure where she was. She came in late and sat down near the door. Her name was Rachel and she asked about getting scrubs to wear when the meeting was opened up for questions. People were like that, they were all sort of caught up in their own thing and there weren't many community issues. Someone had lost something in the laundry and that came up, and they went over the schedule of meetings for the week. Tonight was movie night they said so Peter looked forward to that. During the meeting he was only a few seats from the door so he kept looking over at Rachel. He didn't mean to be weird or rude but she was attractive in a strange, hospital sort of way. She probably wasn't interested in him he thought and it occurred to him that it might not be appropriate to date someone in the hospital but in the absence of anything else important to do she occupied his attention. Pretty soon community meeting was over without much having happened.

After the meeting Peter wandered out into the hallway. He was restless and looking for something to do. There was a TV that was on in the kitchenette area so he sat down at a table with a puzzle near the TV. It was on a talk show and he watched for a while and tried to find puzzle pieces that fit in the puzzle in front of him. The talk show was interviewing people who went on dates with each other and the puzzle was a picture of a covered bridge. People were so worried about the subject of dating he thought. It made him feel guilty that

there was a girl here in the hospital whom he was interested in. Somehow it was like the dating show. There were all kinds of jokes and energy but it all seemed out of place in the hospital like things were somehow supposed to be different here.

Then the girl Rachel came into the kitchen area where he was sitting. She wasn't interested in the TV and she ignored him as she got a bottle of water out of the refrigerator and sat in the corner.

What were people supposed to talk about if flirting wasn't okay, he thought to himself. Life was like that he guessed. He hadn't talked to any girls in quite a while living at the house. It wasn't a co-ed house and no one there had a girlfriend. Sometimes Joe knew some girls who were older like him and all lived on disability too, but usually the only girl he talked to was his social worker, Jeannie. He knew he wouldn't date Jeannie so he concluded that he should treat Rachel like Jeannie.

"How are you doing," he asked out loud.

"Oh I'm o.k.. The flowers out the window are nice," Rachel replied in a chirpy, frail voice.

"Oh," he sort of grunted back, aware that he didn't have much else to say. He concentrated on the puzzle for a minute, but he didn't find any pieces that fit. He was looking for red pieces and there were very few of them.

"This water tastes bad," Rachel chirped innocently. "Is it okay to take the water in the refrigerator," she went on.

"It's just there I guess," Peter said, "maybe I will have one too." So he got up from where he was sitting and opened the refrigerator. They were half a dozen bottles of water left and he took one and sat down awkwardly.

"Yeah this water tastes odd," he said taking a sip.

"Are you watching the TV," Rachel asked then looked to see if there was a remote.

"The remote is probably at the desk," Peter offered and got up again to go outside the room to where the desk was. Once at the desk he asked the nurse if the TV had a remote and she handed him the controller saying to bring it back when he had found a channel. Peter went in the kitchen area and gave the remote to Rachel. "Here it is, we have to bring it back once we find a channel," he said.

Rachel accepted the remote and began flipping channels. She went past another talk show and the news and a dramatic-looking show before she settled on a children's cartoon. "Oh let's watch this," she said and handed the controller back to Peter who dutifully carried it back to the desk.

Peter didn't really watch cartoons so he thought her choice a little silly but he kept on doing the puzzle and looking up once in awhile. Rachel quickly became engrossed in the program which was about a girl and a dragon but Peter began to feel more awkward as time

passed so after a few minutes he gave up on the puzzle and got up to leave. "See you around," he said to Rachel as he left.

Next he noticed people walking up and down the hallway for exercise and he decided to try and walk off some of his restlessness by doing that. The hallway was long and carpeted with a potted plant at one end near his room. One of the other people walking in the hall was talking to himself quietly. It was a little strange but he didn't really think anything of it. For the most part the hospital was a lot less weird than it might have been.

There was another patient walking too, an older woman who frowned at Peter as he passed. But she kept to herself pretty much as he paced himself up and down the hallway going from all the way up by the desk and the TV room down the length of the hall to the potted plant. He counted the steps just to see how far it was and it was about a hundred steps each way. On the way he passed by the open doors of all the patient rooms and he tried not to be nosy but he could see the other patients lying down or folding their laundry or cleaning up. There wasn't much to do he thought and kept walking intently. He walked for about 20 minutes until the woman who was walking was finished and there was only the guy left who was talking to himself. At that point he decided to go back to his room which was empty and he didn't see his roommate anywhere, so he lay back down on his bed and stared at the ceiling for a while. He knew Rory had the best intentions but why

did he have to call the ambulance yesterday he thought. He wished he didn't cry so often but it seemed like what he had to do, like he couldn't really control it. Rory was always encouraging him to get a girlfriend although Rory was an old bachelor himself. Sometimes she thought he really wanted a girlfriend but he knew that what he really wanted to do was write rap songs. He didn't have his phone so he couldn't record songs but he tried to think of one anyway. "Trying to hurt myself on a good day," he mused, "just find got to find a good way, and that would be the end of me."

"Just like hitting the hay they say, pack an overnight bag but stay, it's usually just the way it's got to be."

"Got to stay in the hospital instead laying here on my bed, can't believe they do this to me."

"Someone's got to be in control, it's the only thing that makes them feel whole, I just got to let it be."

"There's so many people like me, I'm a little kind of tree, making my way making my songs the whole day long."

He didn't write down the lyrics so he would have to try to make up the lyrics again sometime when he could record it, but he was glad to start a song anyway. It made him feel like he was doing something productive that would help him get out of the hole he was in and that made him feel better. In some ways making songs was the only thing that made him feel better reliably. Drugs were one thing, both illegal drugs and the kind that were prescribed, but somehow that was different. They temporarily improved his mood but they didn't

really make him feel good about himself. Writing songs did that. It took his mind off life for a little while and made him feel good about himself. After he thought of the words to a new song he felt better and he sat up on the side of the bed and looked around. He had already looked around the room some and there wasn't much to focus on. It was just a room he thought. It was a lot bigger than a room in jail it occurred to him to notice. He wished you could take music lessons and he wondered why people didn't care more about his music.

It was the thing that made him feel good and strong and stable, the opposite of killing himself, but somehow people only imagined that to be healthy he had to be like them. People were like that, he thought. They made an effort to solve problems and be helpful but mostly they had their own agenda. He continued sitting on the side of the bed as the guy who was talking to himself in the hall walked by the doorway. He was glad he didn't have problems like that but he still had problems. He wondered what Rachel's problems were. She seemed a little spaced out but she was nice enough in the TV room. Somehow he didn't really have to think about caring for Rachel. It was like sex or the prospect of it was enough to keep his attention. Getting tangled up with a girlfriend like Rory said was inviting but he wondered if it would take away from his writing songs. Somehow he was a little less interested in having a girlfriend if it interfered with his making up songs.

The big thing was to make songs he thought. That was what made him well and kept him going. His heart was

in it and that was the thing to keep after. It was like that. Somehow he had to go to a place in himself that was deep enough to cover his whole self and for him he had to write songs. Other people didn't seem to try so hard or just didn't get that far and they assumed everybody had to be like them. It was discouraging really when you thought about how many other people there were who were probably felt differently from you.

He just had this feeling that his future could be determined by himself. He was different from the other housemates in that way. He didn't know where he got it from because many people around him felt that what happened to a person was just luck, good luck or bad luck, and there wasn't a lot a person could do to change the world like that. Probably it was Mr Johnson, his teacher in jail. People just felt confidence in teachers sometimes, and Mr Johnson was sort of like that.

Mr Johnson was a large ex cop who taught social studies in juvenile jail. He was kind of stern and tough but he was likable after you got to know him. He would tell stories about when he was a cop and busting people who were idiots and taking them to jail. He said he decided to try and be involved in juvenile justice after one particular incident in which a young man he called John kept getting in trouble. John was an orphan in the foster system who started stealing cars and other things when he was 13. The first time he met John was when John was 16 and he crashed a stolen car into a telephone pole. John was okay but the car was totaled and John was in big trouble. He arrested John and took

him to jail where he was quickly taken away to a juvenile hall and Mr Johnson didn't see him again until he was 19 and was caught committing an armed robbery.

Mr Johnson said he couldn't understand how a young person could be so left out of the system that they just kept getting into worse and worse trouble as they got older. He wanted to get involved and make a difference so he trained to become a teacher and got into juvenile justice. He said John was a very laid back, cool sort of young man that you wouldn't think was prone to getting into trouble. When he arrested him for armed robbery John said "I'm going to jail again," and went quietly along in a reserved short of way. Mr Johnson said he was really glad John didn't put up a fight or anything and was completely impressed by the way John just seem resolved to take make a life for himself in the prison system. It was just the way things were John thought.

Mr Johnson had seen many resigned young people in his career and they were so often the product of the juvenile justice system they thought he would try to do that. It seemed like a hopeful thing to do and you could make a difference in a young person's life. Mr Johnson knew a number of people who started out as cops and then moved on to other positions in the justice system.

Eventually Peter lay back down on the bed again and put his hands behind his head. He wondered when he would get out of this place and as he pondered it occurred to him that he wished he were back at Allen Avenue. At least there were some of the comforts of a house he thought. There were few ways he could hurt himself

there he remembered so he didn't know what all the panic was about. As he lay back he had a fleeting impulse to smoke Marijuana. At Allen Avenue pot took away some of the burden of day-to-day. If he smoked pot in the afternoon he could stay distracted until well into the evening, even after it wore off. He didn't feel like he had a problem with Marijuana because he didn't have access to it very often but he thought he would quit like he had stopped smoking cigarettes. Maybe he would write more songs if he didn't smoke Marijuana.

He remembered one time when he went out and smoked Marijuana with Mark and Joe. Mark was about his age, maybe a little older but he had a mental health diagnosis and was consistently in trouble. From the very beginning of his stay at Allen Avenue he did outrageous things like smoke cigarettes in his room and upset people with this unpredictable habits. He just rubbed people the wrong way by being sort of creepy and sneaking around the house trying the doors to people's rooms at all hours. Bode accused him of trying to steal but that was probably just Bode who gossiped a lot and was quick to stir up trouble. But Mark was almost universally disliked because of his huge problems and he sort of kept himself in the loop socially by smoking pot.

Mark brazenly asked everyone in the house if they "smoked" immediately after arriving and almost everything he did revolved around trying to get pot and smoke it. Peter was polite to him because he tended to be polite to everyone he could and he was especially

indulgent of Mark because he was the same age. One afternoon at the beginning of the month soon after people received their various allowances, Mark had bought some pot which he made a special trip across the city in a cab to get and skipped out on the cab fare. He was out in front of the house where people smoke cigarettes.

"You smoke?"

"Sure," Peter replied, always up for a new adventure.

"Come on," and after a short walk they were in a large lot behind a church that was near the house. Once there Mark sat down on the grass and Joe and Peter joined him.

"Anyone got a pipe," Mark asked and Joe pulled one out of his pocket and handed it to Mark who was holding a plastic bag with a small amount of pot in it. They were conspicuously out in the open but this didn't seem unusual to Mark who was indifferent to trouble. Mark put some pot in the pipe and took out a lighter to take the first hit himself. He then passed it to Joe who grinned and took a hit and then passed it to Peter who had some too. Soon they were relaxed and giddy from the drug.

"Why do you smoke cigarettes in your room and make trouble," Peter asked Mark, "Rory flipped out the other day."

"Rory is a pussy," Mark replied with a sneer.

"He's not that bad," Peter defended him, "he and Albert are ok to get along with."

"I don't care about anything," Mark said putting the pot away in his pocket, "this place is just like any other."

"Albert is all right, he'll yell at you," Peter said, "but he can be really nice too. He made a birthday cake for me last month."

"That cab driver was really upset last night. He came to the door and asked to get paid. Rory said to come back in a week and Mark would have money to pay him. He was shaking he was so pissed but Rory could only tell him to come back."

Mark was silent after this and he just bummed a smoke from Joe and smoked silently.

"I like getting high. I would stay high all the time if I could," Joe said.

"You would, Joe," Peter said. Joe was older than Peter but Peter bullied him because he was kind of an idiot. After this they sat and watched people coming and going from the church that was across the lot from where they were sitting. People pulled up in the parking lot beside the church and got out and went to the church. There must have been a meeting or something. It was the afternoon on a weekday. Eventually too they began to see the elementary school kids who walked through the neighborhood on their way home after school. Some rode bikes and were way ahead of the

others who straggled along as they made their way home.

Peter didn't really have many memories of going to school except for the recent ones in corrections. Soon he was brought back from his reverie by his roommate coming in and lying down. The nurse followed him and as he sat on the edge of his bed she changed the dressing on his injured hand and Peter was glad he didn't have any injuries to tend. He wondered how the man got hurt but he didn't ask and just looked at the nurse who said his hand was looking better. After the nurse left he turned over and faced the wall for a while until it was dinner time.

Dinner was good. He was getting used to the regular meals already and they made him feel better. After dinner he laid down again for a while until it was time for the movie. When it was time for the movie everyone squeezed into another meeting room down at the other end of the ward. The movie wasn't one he would have picked out himself. It was a comedy but he really didn't think it was funny. Everyone sat through the movie and when it was over it was past 8PM. Rachel was there and she sat by the door again. He didn't talk to her or anything. It was kind of depressing to sit all the way through the movie but when it was done he went back to his room and got ready for bed.

After laying down for a long time he found himself falling asleep a little but he slept fitfully, dreaming a little. He dreamed he was on a double date with Rachel. They went to a hip hop show and stood in the crowd for

a while. Rachel liked hip hop and Peter knew the guy performing so after they watched for a while in the dream they were backstage. Everybody was busy and it was weird because no one was talking to each other. Peter's new song was playing and he remembered hearing, "And that will be the end of me," before he woke up again feeling a little strange about the dream.

The night was long and fitful and he realized that his roommate snored in his sleep. There was a street light in the parking lot outside the window that showed through the window, partly illuminating the room. The light kept him awake and he remembered the overnight hours in the morning when the sun came up again. It was the same routine again in the morning and he quickly got used to it. Later in the morning someone came and said the doctor would meet with him so he went down the hall to the meeting room. It was the same doctor again waiting for him and he sat down at the table.

"How are you feeling today," the doctor asked, sitting with his folder in front of him and smiling invitingly, "How did you sleep?"

Peter replied that he felt okay though he didn't sleep very well. He explained that the light in the parking lot had kept him awake shining through the window into the room. "So you don't sleep often at night? Is there a reason you don't sleep at night?"

"Well night time is a good time to write songs," he replied, "it's quiet and people don't bother you. I like the

quiet. During the day I usually like to play video games and at night I settle down and write songs."

"A regular schedule is important to good health don't you think? Do you think you will keep staying up at night? I would suggest trying to sleep at night and keeping your activities confined to the day. We can try something to help you sleep if you want. There's a drug called Melatonin that can help you sleep. It works with your body's natural rhythms to help you fall asleep. What do you write songs about when you stay up?"

"Oh my life and stuff. I just made a new one. Do you want to hear it?"

"Sure, go ahead."

Peter laid down a beat by tapping on the table and began to rhyme, making up a new version of the last song he thought up because he didn't entirely remember it. He didn't write it down and he didn't have his phone with him. "That will be the end of me. Get a gun and do the deed. That would be the end of me."

"Shoot myself in the head. Then I'll be good and dead, no more seeing red."

"Or maybe find another way. To decide to not stay and play. Maybe for some today's the day."

"It kind of goes like that," Peter concluded and stopped tapping on the table because he couldn't think of any more lines.

"Do you write a lot of songs about hurting yourself?"

“Not that many but sometimes I just write about things that pop into my head.”

“How often does it occur to you to hurt yourself, the idea I mean?”

“Only once in awhile really. I just wrote that song about this time. I haven't really thought about it much since I was in jail and that was a couple of years ago now. I used to think about it some when I was in jail.” “Have you ever done anything to hurt yourself?”

“No not really.”

“Just thought about it?”

“Maybe when I was homeless I tried once. I don't really remember. That was a long time ago now.”

“Do you feel like hurting yourself or others now?”

“No I feel ok”

“So you feel differently now than when you came to the hospital a couple of days ago?”

“Yes I do. I didn't really feel very badly then. It was just that Rory asked me and I was upset after being up all night. It was weird.”

“How was it weird?”

“Well I just wasn't really feeling like myself. I cry sometimes, just bawl when I'm upset, and Rory asked me if I wanted to hurt myself.”

"Who is Rory?"

"Rory is a house counselor at Allen Avenue, where I live."

"So he called the ambulance?"

"Yes."

"Well you've got a lot of things to work on. Take it easy and get some rest. I'll tell the nurse to get you some Melatonin, okay?"

"Okay thank you." Peter got up to leave and clumsily pushed his chair back while the doctor smiled encouragingly. After he disentangled himself from his chair he said thank you and let himself out into the hall where he walked around for a while with the others who were out walking today. Somehow he felt sort of disquieted by the meeting with the doctor but the walking cheered him up.

5.

### I Want To Go To College

David Carmichael found himself peering into the open refrigerator again on a Friday morning. It seemed like all he ever did at Allen Avenue was open the refrigerator door and peer inside idly thinking about whether he'd eat or not. It was probably a basic thing about the living situation here there that everybody shared as they tried consciously or unconsciously to focus on appetizing themselves and hovered between a sort of ineffectual boredom and low level activity.

The refrigerator actually varied a great deal between being stocked full of easy-to-eat attractive things and having nothing but a few spoiled leftovers to offer. Today was sort of an in-between day David thought is his gaze strayed around, looking far into the back in some spots and settling for a cursory glance at the front in others. Someone had made macaroni and cheese the

night before and the tin foil wrapped dish had a sort of allure for him that he hoped would last until lunch time.

Otherwise it was all the same old bottles of salad dressing or mustard that he rifled through thinking all the while about how mundane life at Allen Avenue was. It was like the boredom was an accepted baseline for all the residents, something that was a little unusual to Carmichael. He was used to keeping busy in his life and he seldom sank to a point where basic activities tyrannized over his mood. Even if he spent his day staring at the walls in his room he never let eating fully lead him about, just wandering around until his next meal.

The refrigerator was like a sort of central time clock that everyone returned to at the home, wandering away for periods of time as they variously conducted themselves but always eventually subservient to it again. This was the second time down in the kitchen that day which was unusual for him but he had come back down from his room again where he retreated after breakfast and meds and he was sort of restless. Somehow it was more difficult to keep up a routine at Allen Avenue. When it came right down to it the place was more chaotic than he would have liked.

He closed the refrigerator door after a while and sat down at the kitchen table. The table had been unused lately in the mornings except for his own breakfast today at 8AM, which was early for the house, and it was a relief that there were few dishes and little mess to clean up.

From where he sat he could see the white board that listed the residents' chores for the month. On the left hand side there was a list of the chores to be done in the house starting with the kitchen and then listing the bathrooms and the living room and the trash and the floors and the laundry room. On the other side of the board next to the list was a list of peoples' names for who was responsible for the various chores. He noticed that he was responsible for the upstairs bathrooms this month, one of the more difficult chore assignments because they got so much use. He would have to do them later which he prepared himself to do.

Otherwise as usual the house was quiet and he watched out the window where a squirrel was helping himself to the birdseed in the feeder on the back porch. The squirrel scared off two chickadees that were using the feeder and they stepped back a few feet to a small tree in the yard and watched as the squirrel crept up to the feeder then carefully negotiated the squirrel guard that surrounded the feeder with a flat, smooth surface that was supposed to keep the squirrels from raiding it but failed with most of the ones that David had seen. The squirrel would gingerly climb up and stuff his cheeks with the assortment of seeds that filled the feeder and then climb back to scamper off with his Winter load. He did his chore with enthusiasm and when he was gone the chickadees flew back and resumed their pecking.

The backyard was small and mostly filled up with the large porch on which the feeder sat but there was a small garden plot that was not yet prepared for planting

and the trash cans were stored out back to be taken out to the street on the weekly trash day. It was sort of like any suburban yard on the verges of a rural area and David found it a little interesting but forbidding since he had lived by choice in distinctly urban areas for all of his adult life. David had grown up in a rural area next to a farm and a small river for fishing and woods to roam in, but probably for that reason he was highly reluctant to live in the countryside as an adult. Something about the way that the countryside always subsided into a quiet realm of unknown possibility always deterred him from wishing he lived there. He liked to stay sort of alert and always ready to walk the streets or look out the window at signs of other people's lives. For him the countryside was always at rest and somehow people always remained alien to the scenery. Besides, it took a lot of resources to stay connected out in the countryside.

While he sat and thought he heard the counselor at the end of the hall knock on Mark's door, which was right next to the counselor's office.

"Mark, I smell smoke, open up," he said sternly.

Mark didn't come to the door right away and David stiffened at this interruption.

"Open the door, are you smoking," the counselor asked more urgently. Mark didn't relieve the tension by saying anything from behind the door. Instead the silence was heavy and David noticed that he could faintly smell cigarette smoke. "Mark!"

David was always amazed at Mark's audacity at being delinquent. No one else in the house dared to be so much trouble. After a long time Mark eventually came to the door. A cloud of smoke came with him when he opened it.

"What are you doing Mark," Rory asked indignantly, "you know you can't smoke in there."

Mark answered defiantly, obviously lying, "I wasn't doing anything, what do you want, leave me alone."  
"I've got to write you up Mark. That's two written warnings now. If you get three you can't live here anymore. I just don't understand you Mark, you're getting yourself into big trouble."

Mark was silent in reply and Rory went back in the office to write up the written warning. He told Mark to keep the door open for now and Mark came out of his room and came down to the kitchen where he automatically opened up the refrigerator and looked in. He paused a moment before asking belligerently, "That your bologna," to David who responded negatively, offended by Mark's abrasive manner. Mark was an enigma to David. He was just one of those people who chronically stirred up trouble.

To David the younger residents were often like that. They seemed belligerent and troublesome but the counselors took them in stride. It must have been terrifically difficult to deal with them he was thinking to himself as a couple of people came in through the front door. They were talking.

"It was a pretty dull week," Peter Sanchez said as he closed the door, "I didn't have my phone to record songs so I couldn't really write songs. All we did was watch movies pretty much."

Albert was accompanying Peter and they all apparently were just returning to the house." As long as you're feeling better, that's the important thing," he said.

"I guess I am." Everyone was silent, respecting Peter's privacy except Mark who mumbled "Whose macaroni and cheese," to no one particular as they passed by on the way back to the office.

"We will go to the pharmacy to get your prescription a little later. I'll make a nice note for Kataji tonight so he will know what you are doing. Did you get any rest in the hospital? That should help start a habit of sleeping at night. I'll tell Kataji to make the guys keep the music down."

"Okay, I don't know what I want to do. I want to record some songs or something. I haven't recorded any all week."

After this Albert and Peter were silent for a few minutes down in the office and Mark went out the front door they had come in to go outside and smoke. David was relieved to have him go out and he sat for a few more minutes at the kitchen table. The squirrels were gone now and he stared at the chore board wondering if people would do their chores this week. It was kind of annoying the way that people let each other down by ignoring the chore board. It seemed like the trash

always needed to taking out except when the counselors did it and there were always dishes to be done. David tried to be moderately conscientious without sticking out as a goody two shoes. He usually did his chores but not always.

David decided to go upstairs to his room and wait until lunch, so he got up and went up the stairs. The stairs had this railing to help people going up and down and David remembered once when Peter went down the stairs and slipped. "Oh I think I hurt myself," he had said, getting up immediately and moving on. Peter was like that, sort of absent-minded in a friendly sort of way. Upstairs in his room David sat down on his bed.

It was the second time he had been upstairs this morning and he was getting used to his routine. He wondered what Peter had been up to for 2 weeks since he had been taken to the hospital and imagined it was like the times that he, David, had been in the hospital. Boredom was the big thing in the hospital. You just sat around and waited for doctors and nurses to meet with you. He didn't know what hospital Peter had been taken to but he expected it was a local one. It was always a mystery to him how they were interconnected and cooperated with each other but they always seemed to communicate.

The last time David was in the hospital he had stayed here in Portland for a couple of weeks before he was sent to Riverview for a long stay while he found new housing. What mattered about hospital is why you were brought there David thought. That seemed to be the

most important thing to the doctors in his experience. David had been evicted from his apartment so there wasn't a lot of medical concern for his situation, just a lot of sort of punitive censorship that seemed to ask why he got into trouble so much. The doctors were conservative like that but they were very generous with their help nevertheless. David wondered if Peter was treated any differently because he had a criminal record. The time David had been in hospital accused of assaulting a police officer had been hard. Everyone was severe with him for 6 months and he had never felt so bad in all his life.

Peter was probably used to being treated differently since he had his own problems and expected people to be more severe when they found out about his history. David was always struck by how people left punishment and censorship of wrongdoing to police but they were quick to support the police in other ways. No one seemed willing to be friendly toward people with a history of wrongdoing except clergy and other people with a history of past troubles. It seemed obvious that people in trouble needed a sympathetic ear but most people seemed to feel obligated to be strict. It seemed to David like you could pretend not to understand why people did this or you could be more proactive and condemn people's coldness. It really only served to further ostracize people who really needed a break and it made David disappointed in people to know how often they didn't step up to this and many peoples' coldnesses and default cruelty seemed to come through.

It seemed like a lack of courage to David and he resolved to try and not be cold like so many other people. Mark was a different story he thought to himself. Mark was belligerent and willfully made trouble. To be around Mark you had to keep your distance or you would be in trouble along with him he thought. Mark seemed to deal with feeling bad in a different way from other people. He just seemed to feel kind of bad all the time and then to vent this he was aggressive and demanding. David didn't envy Mark although his attitude that got him into trouble seemed to help him get away with a lot too.

People were sort of an obsession to David. He just seemed to think that if you thought about it enough there would be no problems with people. It was kind of just his experience alone although as he grew older he had more bad experiences in his own life which made him feel less optimistic that way. The things that seemed the biggest obstacles with people were coldness and lack of empathy it seemed to him. David had a lot of experience with aloofness and he was urged to be a lot more understanding because of it. He himself had been a person who once thought that life hinged on outdoing others and leaving everybody else behind but he had failed and really learned a lot from his experience.

To be stern and demanding or elitist and distant with people just didn't make sense to him anymore. It seemed to him like what made the world go round was demanding, overachieving people dragging around

people whose hearts were elsewhere and like if people came with a higher priority that the world would be very different. Take Peter for instance, for what David knew Peter was one of those people being dragged along by a world that obsessively sought financial growth and Peter wasn't one to really question the way things were going. It seemed like Peter just stumbled through life with only a few motivations to drive him onward and this made his motivations all the more important.

Were Peter's desires any less important because he wasn't the chief financial officer of a large corporation? It seemed like the world set people aside a lot in that way. It followed the logic that if there were a large number of people in the population then each person's desires were mathematically that much less important. The world would never be anything but a superficially happy place as long as it treated individuals in this way. It substituted basic human needs for developed desires like creativity and called people fulfilled if they married and reproduced and fed their kids. The system perpetuated itself because succeeding was instinctive.

But the thing was that people were more complex than that. David didn't want to eschew a system that made the world go round but he felt like so much energy of the world was used up in a disappointingly inefficient system. If you ask people what they wanted and what they wanted was a wife and kids some might say who is to question it. But to David these things seemed to sacrifice all of a person's efforts for one basic goal that didn't fit everyone very well.

David thought that the world could and should continue itself like a well-oiled machine that accomplished subsistence with a minimum of effort. People should be able to take for granted that food, housing and healthcare were provided. The world should work together to provide these basic minimums to everyone. That everyone had to negotiate for themselves these universal needs was terrifically inefficient. Instead the world divided itself into people with resources to invest and people who had to go along with whatever came their way. The world was thoroughly able to organize itself on a scale this large but it only had a will to do so on a for-profit basis. The most important thing was widespread equality not widespread profiteering. When you thought about it there was a basic widespread mistrust between people that resulted in so many bad things. It was in many ways the source of most crime, in that the demands for all the different forms of order that came with all kinds of small enterprises pushed so many people aside and caused them to resist and rebel.

One simple thing that should be obvious was that if work were mandatory it should be guaranteed. Instead of all the complicated machinations occasioned by various profit-seeking, to-each-his-own undertakings basic work requirements should be just that--basic. Every young and vigorous person should report for basic minimum work requirements and there should be no jockeying for choice positions. More accomplished professional positions should be done as a matter of prestige by older individuals. It was because of the very

rat race of private enterprise that so many creative people consumed their entire lives making a living when there should be time for creative undertakings. Basic work should be the basic minimum requirement that people must do. Instead open-ended competition with other nations uses up everybody's lives. Without simple-minded, close-minded, archaic concepts like profit there would be little to fear from the people of other nations. It was all a failure of human relations really.

David looked up restlessly from where he was sitting on his bed in his room. Somehow nothing was secure enough in his situation to be productive and everything was a temporary stopgap. Himself, he wished he could work on his journal every day. It made him feel productive to get some writing done whenever he could but somehow the background conditions were not really there. To write some it mattered that he spend time thinking of things to write down and although he found himself alone and thinking a lot it was something about his brain that required very regular sensitized circumstances to come up with good things to write. Among other things, interacting with other people had to be limited.

David decided to go downstairs again and abandoned the attempt to write that day. It was a day that was full of possibilities he thought because the weather was okay and he hoped Mark would stay outside to smoke. When he got downstairs to the kitchen again he found Peter sitting at the kitchen table with a pile of wires and

electronic parts in front of him. Peter was always taking apart electronic devices to try and understand how they worked and David could relate because he remembered his own curiosity about things like that when he was younger. David had a similar pile of electronic junk in his room when he was in his early teens and he had figured out some basic things like transformers and batteries in this way.

"How are you doing, Peter," he asked when he came in.

"Oh I'm doing okay I guess," the 20-year-old replied. To David, Peter seemed very young and he could hardly remember what he was like himself at 20.

"I used to take apart radios and make batteries out of lemons and copper strips when I was younger. It was interesting. Everything must look different now.

"Yeah I took apart a broken laptop once. The CPU alone was worth \$100. Once I left my phone in the washer and it got wet and I was able to dry it out with rice. It's good to have my phone again so I can write songs. I have written hundreds of songs. I just record them. My phone lays down a drum track and I can record over it."

"Well that's cool. I write in my journal. Do you write down your songs?"

"No the recording is the only thing I make. I want to get a CD burner and make CDs that I can record and sell in the Old Port."

"It's tough when you want to make money from things. Sometimes it helps just to do things for the

accomplishment of them. It's good to do things that you're proud of. You know creative things. It's what I really want to do with myself. I've been trying for a really long time."

"Yes I want to make rap songs. I don't know how it's going to work out."

"You have to really commit to things and that can be difficult. I remember when I was your age I had a lot of distractions. I would go to a job during the day and get up really early in the morning to write before work. I wrote a few things but it went slowly."

"I have been writing songs at night."

"That makes it hard to get enough sleep. I have to get enough sleep. I have had to ever since college." "I want to go to college."

"How did you do in high school?"

"I went to high school in corrections. They convicted did of something I didn't do."

"Oh what happened?"

"Well when I was 14 I was homeless because my mother was in jail and my brother couldn't take care of me anymore. I was born when my mother was in jail but my brother took care of me most of the time growing up. Anyway my mother went to jail again. That's where she is now and I was living in a lean-to that I built near a trail. I was hanging around with some people during the day

and I got into a lot of fights. After a while a car was stolen near where I lived in the woods and one day the cops came out looking around. They accused me of stealing the car and abandoning it nearby but I didn't do it. I was charged and after I talked to them awhile and got in some fights in detention I was convicted and sent to jail at Long Creek. I went to high school there."

"To go to college you have to submit your records to admissions. I don't know how I feel about college now. It's hard to imagine omitting college because it didn't turn out the way I expected it to. I expected college to start a career for me but instead they sort of sold me the lessons and hung me out to dry. I was the first person to go to college from my family. You should prepare to totally commit yourself to college," David put in.

"I don't know what I would study in college but I guess I want a good job."

"That's the thing about college. Everybody wants a good job. The competition is fierce."

"I want to make rap music for a job."

"That's a tall order. If you want to do something creative the big thing is doing your thing. It requires even more commitment than say, electronics. I feel like I have had to sacrifice everything to try and be a writer, things I never would have imagined at your age. It's just that the thing itself is hard and being a starving artist type isn't practical for me. I learned early on when I was homeless as a teenager that I needed a roof over my head to

write. You probably need even more than that to make songs."

"Yeah, I feel that way."

"It's just that there are so many other people who have advantages over you. And the social challenges are huge. That was the real thing for me in college. I never imagined there could be so many other smart people who had more money than me and wanted a good job too. I was really overwhelmed socially. People's special abilities start to really come through in college. If I were you I'd really center myself before going to college. I did. I waited until I was older, 25 or so, and I still had big problems."

"Sometimes I think I should go to community college. That might be a place to start out."

"Yeah that's a very good idea. You can study electricity. That's a place to begin with electronics. Electronics is really small amounts of electricity."

Peter continued tinkering with his electronic parts and David looked in the refrigerator to see if there was any macaroni and cheese left.

"Don't forget to eat, Peter, " David continued, "do you want some macaroni and cheese?"

"Sure, I'll have some," Peter replied and David found two bowls and cleaned them in the sink. The dishes were always dirty at the house and had to be cleared before you could use them. David was going out of his way to be nice to Peter, but he didn't mind if he stuck

his neck out a little bit. He could remember the day Peter had gone to the hospital and felt a little bad for him. He worried about Peter somehow and he could relate to the way he was interested in making music. David scooped out the gooey macaroni and cheese and put the bowls in the microwave. After a minute they came out and David put one of the bowls near where Peter was sitting. Peter got up to get a spoon.

"Thanks, Peter" Peter said and sat down again to eat. David cleared a space at the table and sat down to eat too. It was a little strange to be eating lunch with someone else because usually everyone else ate alone at the house. Fixing your own meals was one of the responsibilities of the house because cooking was a life skill people were encouraged to work on. David remembered when Peter had made a big pot of spaghetti for the whole house and he said to Peter, "I don't know who made this macaroni and cheese but it's good like the spaghetti you made. You should make spaghetti again sometime."

When he found out he had to cook for himself David started out at the house by trying to make the things like bread he had made for himself in his previous living situation. He remembered that his bread didn't come out that well but people ate it.

After they ate in silence from then on, David put his bowl in the sink and went upstairs to his own room thinking about Peter. It awed him really to think about how he had failed at college although he tried to keep so many positive advantages going for him, and how

Peter wanted to try college coming from an even more difficult situation. In David's opinion college worked best if you were affluent. More than anything it was ostentation where society screened out people who weren't being conformist and affluent young people engaged with social challenges that were different than people in more austere situations. Of course there were always exceptions for people who are just plain fanatic about studying but Peter didn't seem to be quite that type. Peter just sort of inspired worry he thought.

6.

### Pizza Boy

In a few weeks Peter's world was turned upside down. It was the unanimous agreement of all the staff who worked with him, Rory, Albert, Annie and Jeanie his social worker, that Peter would benefit from getting a job. It was thought that any job would be beneficial and that this was the best thing for Peter. He would get some activity, make some money, and generally fit into the larger world better in a way that would prepare for his future Independence.

So that spring after a trip to the hospital and weeks of apparent inactivity at the house, Peter was setting out mid-morning to go to a nearby Pizza Boy restaurant where he worked an 8 hour shift 4 days a week. Actually his schedule was less reliable than that with the manager just making up different hours as he went along from week to week but since the amount of pay

was the same for those hours they were considered interchangeable.

Peter no longer stayed up nights unless he worked late and he lost his nervous, creative manner replacing it with a sort of tired, matter-of-fact look that the staff considered to be an improvement. As he started out the door and walked down the street he was wearing the plain white T-shirt and jeans that he was required to wear and he had a pair of work shoes that he was breaking in. It was a fairly nice day out but he didn't notice that much as he drudged along. The Pizza Boy was just a few blocks away from the Allen Avenue Welcome House and he walked along at a brisk pace, fairly eager to get in to work and see what was going on there today. Along the way there were single family homes pressed up close to the street and the bus went by the stop which he sometimes took to go into downtown Portland. In the nearby strip mall where Pizza Boy was located there was a large grocery store, a pharmacy, a Starbucks and a small assortment of other small retail shops. The other residents from the house were fairly regular patrons of the area when they had money to spend and when Peter had gone to ask about employment at Pizza Boy people recognized him as a customer.

It was Jeanie who first suggested that he get a job to use up his time and at first he had responded positively to her suggestion, agreeing that the independence would be good. Jeanie was a nice young woman with blonde hair who was about 30 whose job was to try to bring

together all the disparate elements of Peter's unorthodox life. It was Jeanie who met with Peter's stepmother and Jeanie who was the person responsible for imagining how Peter's future would measure up. She had a big job. There was only so much to work with she thought as she tried to plan for people's future Independence. To her Peter's music was a positive thing but she doubted that his dreams of it supporting him could happen.

The key was that there was a system in the world that supported adjusting to realities not taking long shots at changing the world to be a better place. What was really necessary was support for Peter to commit himself to music. Government and social services didn't take into consideration that what was important about Peter was salvaging his soul. He needed something to believe in and he was one of the rare people who followed through to creative dreams. The thing was that all of the support system that was being put together for him imagined a sort of lackluster, uncreative life for him. It didn't try to grow a whole person; it tried to support a whole person. Some would have thought Jeanie was doing her best but she wasn't imaginative enough to dream for Peter.

At his interview at Pizza Boy, which he had arranged for himself, Peter didn't even mention that he was into music.

"How are you doing today," the manager, Brett, who was a young man about Peter's size, sturdy and short, had asked at the interview.

"I'm doing ok," Peter had replied, taking a seat in the tiny, cramped office behind the kitchen.

"Do you have any kitchen experience," Brett asked. Brett was about 25 years old and he was ambitious and down to earth. He had a sporty late model car out in the parking lot that his manager position funded and to him Pizza Boy was simply about his salary, something he thought was true of all employee.

"Well I worked in the kitchen a little while I was in jail. I was a cook and I prepped lunch and dinner trays some."

"What were you in jail for," Brett asked.

"Something I didn't do," Peter replied shortly.

Brett looked up in puzzlement at Peter when he said this but he decided to let it pass and reacted like most people did when Peter claimed he was not guilty. He was skeptical but agreeable because he was especially short of employees.

"Okay I don't have to get into that. Why do you want to work at Pizza boy?"

To this Peter was brutally honest because he was relieved that Brett had accepted what he said about going to jail. He got tired of having to retell the story of his conviction every time it came up. "Well my social worker wants me to get a job. I live in a group home here and she wants me to be independent."

"Oh you live near here," Brett perked up, "that's good." After hearing this Brett had pretty much decided to

offer Peter a job and he introduced him to Jonah, the other employee at Pizza Boy. Jonah seemed cheerful enough to Peter who was all too willing to cooperate. Jonah was about 17 and was just out of high school. He had come to Pizza Boy because he just liked pizza a lot. All in all Brett and Pizza Boy were lucky to have Jonah and Peter who were both friendly, enthusiastic employees without whom Pizza Boy wouldn't have produced anything let alone tasty fresh pizzas.

When Peter got to the store that morning Brett and Jonah were already there and he put on his red apron and his name tag and got to work in the back preparing a few pizzas for the coming lunch rush. Peter's job at the time was to make up the dough and get it rising before the customers came and to puree the tomatoes for the fresh sauce. When it was time to make the pizzas Peter took a ball of risen dough and stretched it into a circle that fit in one of the pizza pans that were stacked near the pizza table. The dough then got a layer of sauce and cheese and some pepperoni according to the order.

It was Jonah who had made up the other toppings that day and soon they all found themselves putting pizzas into the revolving conveyor belt open for the lunch rush.

"Not too bad for a Wednesday," Jonah said. They all took an interest in how well business was doing although only Brett got a commission or bonuses. "How many large do you need," Peter asked next. Brett was up at the counter taking orders and the receipt slips came out of a machine next to Jonah closer to the front.

"Just two," Jonah replied with a glance at the strip of orders being prepared.

"Okay, I've got them," Peter said reaching for a couple of balls of dough.

"Where is Delia," Peter asked aloud. Delia was another employee whom Peter had met the week before. She had helped with the lunch rush.

"Well apparently she quit, or was fired, Brett didn't exactly say. She didn't come in a couple of days ago so Brett was left all by himself on Monday."

"She seemed nice," Peter said, stretching out a ball of dough.

"She had been here for 6 months or more, since before I graduated. She missed shifts before. I think she had problems making a regular shift"

"That's too bad. Work takes up all your time. Was she into other things?"

"No I think she just didn't get into coming in regularly. Some people are like that. Some people get it and some people don't. Work and people are funny like that. You're worried that things aren't steady enough at home sometimes. Sometimes people are distracted by boyfriends or girlfriends. Work is a big demand on people's schedules."

"I know. It's hard to commit yourself if you're not into it. I get tired now and then. It seems like all I do is work. I

don't know when I'd go to college." Peter reached for another pizza pan as he said this, intent on his task.

"Yeah I think about going to college. This is pretty easy but I probably won't want to do it forever. Brett didn't go to college and he makes quite a bit of money. College would take a lot of thought and I don't know if that's really for me. I just like to do things. My mother went to college and she likes work sort of. She is a pharmaceutical sales representative. She sells pills to doctors. I probably couldn't do that. I didn't like school very much and doctors are kind of imposing. I'm just doing this while I think of something to do. I like work. It gives me something to do." Jonah reached for a couple more pizzas strips as they came out of the machine and Peter paused a moment to stretch his arms.

Peter kept silent for a minute because he didn't know what to say to Jonah. Jonah had been doing this job for a couple of years and he said he liked it. Peter didn't want to spoil everything with a negative comment but he was beginning to feel like he wanted to do something else like writing music. He hadn't made any songs since he got out of the hospital and started working and he felt like he didn't have much purpose. "Some people keep busier than others," he said aloud.

"Yeah if I went to college like my mother wants me to, I wouldn't have time to work. I would have to go back to my old schedule in high school. I liked work better than high school. Don't get me wrong, high school wasn't

that bad but I was never really interested in it that much.”

“Well I went to school in corrections and worked in the kitchen some too. In corrections everything runs together because you are in one place. I probably did better in school in corrections than I would have as a homeless person outside. I worked 2 hours a day in corrections every night in the jail kitchen. The work was okay. It fit in with everything else in jail which meant that it wasn't that much fun. What I liked about school was the music class. We didn't get to do it a lot but we got to play instruments a little. School is the part of jail that sort of didn't feel like jail. We went to a separate building every day.”

"Oh wow, I have never really gotten in trouble with the cops. It doesn't seem like a good thing. People turn against you and stop believing in you."

“Yeah that's really true. I don't really believe in the system that much because I was put in jail for something I didn't do but it's had a big effect on my life. You just do what you have to do I guess but I learned to stick up for myself in jail. People will help you if you ask. It sounds like your mom is rich.”

“That's one of the really big things about her job. It pays well. Jobs are like that. They seem unfair. It's sort of like they reward the amount of effort and commitment they involve but it seems like for some people it doesn't matter how hard they try. They are stuck at the bottom.

I hope I am able to do okay. I want to live a good life and I want nice stuff."

"I just pretty much care that I have enough to get by. It would be great to get rich and all but I just want a place to live and food to eat. Sometimes I'm not very hopeful. When I think about it the things I want are different from a lot of people. I want to fix things and make things. It makes me feel decent to do things like that."

"Oh I'm different from you that way. I don't care a lot about what I do, just that I can do it. I can't imagine living without nice stuff. Some people think that's not a very good thing but it doesn't bother me."

Peter and Jonah talked like this for a while during the busy time and the shift seemed to fly by. Soon it was slow and they cleaned up and got things ready for the evening. Peter's shift lasted into the beginning of the evening then he took off his apron and started walking home.

Meanwhile earlier in the afternoon David had been trying to do some work too. He had been sitting in his room staring at the wall not writing until mid-afternoon. The time slid by slowly. He generally did not regret this inactivity very much because he knew enforced leisure was fundamental to being able to write. It was the lesson he was slowly learning. He imagined that the best early start for a writer was a sickly childhood or idle Summers spent at home engaged in a lethargic search for something to do. It wasn't for everybody.

As someone coming from an austere background trying to become a writer much of the hurdle he realized was in finding the time and circumstances that were conducive to writing. In part it was his illness or condition or mild criminality, whatever you wanted to call his schizophrenia. He processed information slowly and writing required processing information, but in a way he suspected that even for people without a medical condition writing was an activity for which large, uninterrupted blocks of time were required. David actually found that he could do a little else without seriously distracting himself from his activity.

In the summer when he was younger and first finding things to do there had been plenty of jobs and chores to do. He had done yard work for his relations and acquaintances. He'd worked full-time on a farm. By the time he was 15 he was working in a restaurant at the nearby commerce hub, the Maine Mall. His earliest attempts at writing during these days were short, frustrated poems that didn't rhyme or have meter. He was a reader during those years. He read a lot which was different from writing. Reading required about half the concentration of writing so he could still accomplish it in his limited free time.

Sitting in his room, thinking about reaching for his notebook and his duty of performing a chore which was left undone was weighing him down with distraction so he decided to eventually try and accomplish it so it would stop distracting him. About 2PM he shifted his

legs to the side of the bed and quietly shuffled downstairs.

He went first to the laundry room which was adjacent to the kitchen which was where the motley collection of cleaning supplies were kept. There were sometimes a few paper towels and some Windex kept there which would have to be sufficient to his task. From the laundry room he carried the supplies to the upstairs bathroom and looked in the door tentatively. The first bathroom was in disarray. Someone had splashed water all over the floor which was the first arresting obstacle he encountered to his task. The trash can was overflowing with paper towels. Someone's foul habit of dribbling toothpaste into the sink but not rinsing it out was in evidence by the mirror which was splashed with toothpaste too. If it was true that most of his housemates were refugees from homelessness or unorthodox living situations the bathroom betrayed them even more as being barely civilized slobs who had never lived in a functioning environment.

David tried to imagine what it would be like to be so wretched. No attention span, no orderliness, constant laziness came to mind as some of the causes of the mess. He connected their slovenly habits in the kitchen with the complete disaster in the bathroom. To David, who was a little obsessed with neatness although in his own space he tended to let things go, they seemed totally oblivious to other people's sensibilities and utterly shameless. David would have been ashamed to leave such a mess behind him, but to these boys, and

that's what they seemed like to him, a mess was just something they reveled in, sort of like dogs rolling in excrement. David felt like it would take the earnestness of a parent to commit to correcting them and trying to remedy their ways.

These boys were completely ineligible as domestic partners it seemed to him and without someone to clean up after them they would do nothing but accumulate filth in a living situation. David grasped the enormity of the task of rehabilitating them. Where would someone begin?

Welcome House was trying to inculcate basic living skills and they did so by assigning chores and patiently doing them for the boys when they were left undone. Human behavior was such a challenge this way.

Could anything but parental patience correct their ways and make them more livable roommates? David thought of his own experience living in dormitories. People slowly bent their habits to accommodate the others around them he remembered. His own habits had been pretty deficient when he was younger.

Being exposed to the inconvenience of others' messes had changed him. He remembered how people said, "Yuck" and got over the problem in school. He tried to think why it was different and some people had a more functional relationship to their mess and to each other. Maybe that was it, the way they related to each other. Personal animosity was only by exception in school.

People behaved as if everyone deserved respect and they were flattered to know each other.

It was different with the egalitarian free for all of a Welcome House group home. People obligingly associated but there was little in common except lowest common denominator things like drugs or homelessness or jail. It didn't inspire the brotherhood of man David thought. To him that would have made all the difference in chores he thought. It took the work out of the tasks. When you cleaned your cat's litter box it might seem a little repulsive at first, but after doing it a while you didn't think about that and you were just glad to make your beloved cat comfortable. That was how work should get done. Even the most repulsive task becomes easy if you have any interest in caring about the people around you.

He imagined what a Herculean task it would be to inspire the brotherhood of man among these rough boys. They were cagey. No one especially trusted anyone else and there was a deficit of goodwill. David wondered how religion inspired the brotherhood of man. Religion was selective to begin with; people self-nominated to become religious. As well there was a constant barrage of feel-good and do-good propaganda. The teachings of Jesus were one huge example, but David was stumped about how to inculcate good feelings without resorting to a belief in the supernatural.

David thought it was the way humans thought. They associated human behavior with childhood and

unruliness. He wondered if that was necessary. Somehow it seemed possible that there could be a lot more order in human childrearing if people didn't abandon each other once they had the responsibility of children. Community reproduction and child-rearing seemed like the obstacle that located humanity in the throes of the Stone Age. It seemed obvious to David big changes were required.

David didn't know where to start with the bathroom. The water everywhere seemed like the primary obstacle so he backed out of the door and went back downstairs to get the smelly old mop. It was kept in the mop bucket full of dirty water and David betrayed his experiences as a kitchen helper by knowing how to use it. He used the ringer and went back up the stairs.

The way that people forced work to create harmony among people was backwards he thought. Harmony among people first meant their work was not a source of strife. The world would be different if there was an emphasis on harmony first. The unruliness of people didn't have to be so. It was like the bathroom soaked in water from the shower. You couldn't clean anything else and you couldn't go in the room. The floor wasn't that large to clean but it took a few minutes. There was a lot of water. It was like someone had no idea how to use the shower without making an enormous mess. David soaked up the water by the bathtub first.

Next he went back downstairs and wrung out the mop. It made more sense to carry it back and forth than to bring the heavy bucket up the stairs. Then he found

himself removing the trash can and the bath mat to make room to mop. He put them just outside the door and went back in with the mop, absorbing the rest of the water on the floor. When he was done he carried the mop back downstairs and left it in the laundry room.

Upstairs again he got some paper towels and continued his labor of love. There was a brush that sat next to the commode and he found some bleach to clean it with. Then he conscientiously wiped everything down and moved on to the sink. His philanthropy was really challenged here but he cleaned it up and stuffed the dirty towels into the overflowing trash can. To squirt the mirror with cleaner and wipe it off seem like a relief after the proceeding germ and bacteria-infested tasks.

The other bathroom, just across the hall, wasn't wet but someone had made made a ridiculous mess in the shower cleaning out their personal aquarium. They had ineptly scattered aquarium gravel all over the drain at the bottom. David sighed heavily and tried to think how to clean it out. He decided to get a dustpan and see if a broom would scoop up the scattered pebbles. This has to be done, you can't walk in the shower he thought. Who could be such an imbecile?

The dust pan was effective for getting out the mess and after digging out the grooves around the drain with his fingers to get out the last of it, the drain was clean and might function again. It was ridiculous to clean after his housemates but he summoned all his moral fortitude and got it done. The last thing he did was empty the

trash can and put new liners in the cans, then get more toilet paper from the office where it was kept.

Down at the office it was Albert who readily handed David the extra rolls of toilet paper from the closet when he asked.

"Doing my duty to my fellow man, " David said.

"Oh really, " Albert shot back, puzzled and surprised at David's sentiment but friendly.

"Well that's very philanthropic of you," Albert said, feeling responsible for positive feelings in the house and always sort of artificially and mercenarily a booster to the residents. Albert was an interesting guy to David because he worked all the time and was obsessed with income. He was a social worker at the house and he worked long shifts and long hours to cover the desk there. This was okay with Albert because he used the extra days off to work as a real estate agent. Albert was divorced and working to put his son through college apparently. David was always amazed at other people's challenges. Himself, he often thought he had his own obstacles to getting ahead in the world. To him it seemed like his social challenges were at the heart of his financial challenges. But Albert seemed like he was the person with just enough resources to be afraid of losing them which involved him in a laborious cycle of work and income to support his lifestyle. If he were Albert, David thought, just being a social worker would be an adequate contribution to the world. Albert

seemed like a nice guy but somehow he didn't seem like he worked for the love of mankind.

So much work stemmed from that sort of cash anxiety it didn't seem healthy to David. First things first he thought. It was like the world didn't need to be complicated but it often got that way.

"I think I believe in the brotherhood of man. It makes chores easier. They make me feel like I used to cleaning up after my cat. I loved my cat so I enjoyed cleaning up after her. Chores should be like that," David continued.

Now Annie and her dog, Truck, chimed in. They were in the small office next door sitting and listening to them. "That's the idea, David, I like the way you think. You should tell the rest of the guys that."

Albert agreed cheerily, and then switched the subject. "So next Tuesday we can go to visit Danforth Street," he said, "it looks like they are going to have a vacancy."

"Okay thanks," David replied, taking his task back up the stairs where he met Mark coming down. He didn't say anything at first but Mark spoke in his usual jeering, insolent tone.

"Look who's kissing the staff's ass and doing their chores," he said as he passed by.

David replied sarcastically, "You bet Mark, just keep it up," and continued on up the stairs and delivered the toilet paper.

7.

### Just, Reasonable And Important

On the next Tuesday after he cleaned the bathrooms for his chore David was sitting in his room and thinking about the brotherhood of man. If he thought about it people sort of formed a pyramid of influence and influences distributed resources according to the social hierarchy. The problem, he thought, was not that people tend to organize in a hierarchy, after all it wasn't a really very steep or distant hierarchy, but instead it was the way people earnestly tried to emphasize their natural differences and leave behind others who weren't as personable. Take for instance, David thought, a callous and unempathetic rich person. It was easy to see how a person with excessive resources could become rather unfeeling. Not only were they insulated from humbling impulses that could completely curtail a less fortunate person's life but a rich person was

surrounded by resentment of their position from many people around them.

David thought about the way people did everything in their power to insulate themselves from the day-to-day humiliations all around them. He wondered what it would take to create an ethos of functional humility among people. Everyone should have to cook and clean bathrooms, or mow lawns or take out the trash. No one should be exempt except maybe the old. Life took a lot of drudgery to accomplish and nothing and no one should be so important that they were above it. Equality of chores created a shared sense of brotherhood that would do away with the strain of a sort of alienation from the nuts and bolts of everyday life that took over hierarchies when hierarchies became economic.

There were all sorts of other tasks that people could do to distinguish themselves. Specializations should only take place after the drudgery was done. If important meetings were delayed while the participants got some cleaning done that was a good thing because it fostered a sense of egalitarian community instead of winner-take-all privileges. It was things like this David thought that could take away problems like unhappiness and crime and discontent among people. People were so prone to isolating themselves, and this was different from privacy to pursue solitary undertakings.

People sort of only thought about their own benefit, and when they dealt with each other they resorted to a sort of shorthand thinking it seemed. I do for you and you do for me was the only thing that people gave

importance to in their thinking. They just dismissed community perspectives out of hand and refused to go there. David thought you couldn't say enough about this because it was a perspective that was sort of abandoned after elementary school.

It was like people only taught what they themselves believed in and it was like people refused to see further than what was around them so the world changed little. Children should be raised in little communities separate from adults. They should be supported independently from the existing world and taught new ideals. If they weren't, he thought, they would keep making the same lowest common denominator mistakes forever. People could live differently now and the first thing they should abandon are families and replace them with communities of peers from a young age.

David's daydreaming came to an end abruptly when there was a knock on the door.

"David do you want to visit Danforth Street today? We can take a ride over to see it if you want," Albert's voice came from behind the door.

"Okay I'll be down in a minute," David called out. David quickly got his shoes on and got his phone. He had to sit on the floor to put on his shoes because there was no chair in his room but he was used to that. David took spartan living for granted and he was full of hope for living at Danforth Street. It would be in town which would be a lot more convenient, and he felt out of place at Allen Avenue.

David went out the door and downstairs to the office. Albert was there waiting. "Do you want to go to Danforth Street," he asked.

"Yes I do," David replied.

"The person that is living there found another place. They were having problems like you were in the housing market but they eventually found something. Let's get going." The two of them, Albert dressed in his social worker clothes and David and his saggy jeans and hand-me-down thermal shirt set off for the front door leaving Rory behind in the office by himself. "The car is over there on the street. I don't know if they will have any parking at Danforth Street. There's only one space."

After a short walk they were standing next to a 20-year-old Honda Civic that looked like it had a lot of miles on it. David was surprised at the old car. He was sure Albert's salary could afford a better car than this. He said out loud in amazement, "This is your car!" The door handle moved but didn't open the door.

"You bet, some of these Hondas will go 300,000 miles. Just a minute I have to open it from the inside," Albert said cheerily.

David had owned few cars in his life. They were always too expensive and undependable. To him it seemed obvious that more people should use public transportation. Cars were really a real estate cost and the way people spread out to live was to blame for it he thought. To him there was no reason for a sprawling

real estate market when people could live closer together in high-rises with access to the bus.

To David's amazement the car started right off when Albert turned the key and soon they were backing out in their old clunker. Albert even listened to AM talk show radio because it was the only thing that got reception. "Do you actually save a lot of money by driving a car like this," David asked, "it would seem like the breakdowns could be costly." Albert was definitely not the mechanic type.

"Yes I get by. You can get a lot of miles out of an old car sometimes. Do you want to get yourself a car?"

David replied that no, cars were something that could be improved upon in the world he thought. He was a public transportation guy. Cars were just one of the few things that David concluded were generally not worth the cost for living in the world. David said he had grown up with cars and racing cars especially but by the time he got to junior high school his interest had faded. "Do you live far away from here," he asked.

Albert replied, "Yes it's a short drive. I don't live on the bus line either."

"So many people don't live on the busline," David commented. "People pay so much for personal transportation. It's like they just opt for what is private even if they can't afford it. It's a racket," David said. "I once looked up the statistic that 75 to 80% of people in the US live in greater metropolitan areas of 125,000 people or more. Ever since ancient Rome people have

voted with their feet for urbanization if they could. Do you live far out in the country," David asked.

"No I live about 10 or 15 minutes from the end of the bus line. It's quiet and pleasant." As they slowly made it into downtown Portland Albert eventually announced that it looked like there was a parking space available. They pulled into the spot tucked away behind the building and got out.

Could you leave the window down on your side? It's tough to get that door open again."

"Okay," David replied, squeezing awkwardly between the car

and the building, which was an urban duplex squeezed in a row close to other buildings like it near the street.

"Welcome House properties are scattered throughout the city," Albert explained, "there's lots of different choices." They were standing at the door which was locked and Albert pressed the doorbell. As they waited for a moment he explained that both men and women lived at Danforth Street and people were generally older so David might fit in pretty well. Eventually a short, dark-haired smiling woman came to the door

"Hi," the woman said as she opened the door. Albert introduced the woman as Alicia and went on that this was David with him from Allen Avenue. Alicia and Albert apparently knew each other.

There was no one else around in the house which was quiet at the time and Alicia went and got the key to the

room which she said was upstairs. Next they went around the house a little in a sort of tour before they checked out the room. There was a kitchen at the back of the building where Alicia explained that everybody got their own cupboard space to store food in and people had to label their food that they put in the refrigerator. People went on shopping trips to the grocery store every week or two and people mostly took care of their own food.

There was a phone near the kitchen if people didn't have a cell phone and wanted to order take-out or anything which people did pretty regularly. The eating area was out near the front door and there was a community meal where people cooked and ate together once a week. Albert and Alicia asked if David would like to come in sometime for a community meal and meet the other people in the house and David said yes he would like to. They went from the kitchen down to the basement where the laundry was after that and he began to get a sense that the house was a little more cramped together than Allen Avenue, but he didn't say anything because he felt modest about not having any other choices for a place to live.

Technically David was homeless having lost his previous place to stay and having chronic problems with housing but he was glad for the new opportunity and prepared to stay forever if that's how things worked out. After squeezing downstairs into the storage and laundry area the three of them came back up and went to the front room where there was a couch and chairs and a TV

people could watch. The place was mostly neat and clean so David asked if people did their chores.

Alicia said yes people did their chores and David was glad to hear that chores might be less of a problem with his new housemates. "I don't know where everyone is today. People usually watch TV during the day," Alicia said.

"But it's generally pretty quiet here," Albert put in. Albert had been a social worker at many of the Welcome House group homes and he had been there at Danforth Street years before also. David got the idea that people rotated around to stave off boredom and keep abreast of all the houses. Next they went upstairs to the second floor where they were two bathrooms with showers in them that looked like they got cleaned sometimes but maybe not all the time. There was another floor above them but all the bathrooms were on the second floor.

Finally they opened the door to room number 4, which was adjacent to the bathrooms. There was a fair amount of space in the room which was plain and had a couple of items of a furniture in it like his room at Allen Avenue. A small bed was pushed to one side of the room and there was a metal cabinet for a closet. "At Danforth Street it's hot in the Summer and cold in the Winter," Alicia said, raising the shade on one of the windows to let a little more light in. "What do you think?"

David hesitated a little before he quickly answered that things looked great. To himself although he tried not to

show it he was a little disappointed because he had very high hopes that the room would be an improvement upon his present one. And in his heart he was looking for a place to be productive and he didn't know if this gray, small space was going to be an improvement. He wondered if he had found the right mix of comfort and utility to sit and stare and start to crank out pages like he wanted so he would feel like he was getting something done with his life.

He felt frustrated that he had an ambition and the basic components of pursuing it were a little elusive. First of all he needed quiet although technically solitude wasn't completely necessary and he had written for years in his previous living situation carrying around a notebook in his backpack. He would write during long bus rides and on park benches, stimming with his hands to concentrate better. It wasn't ideal but as long as he had a chance to clear his head and let his thoughts percolate before and after he did okay.

Maybe he could sit in the TV room downstairs and write. He would wait and see but he had a little hope for progress. At Allen Avenue there wasn't really a lot of quality focused time and he certainly couldn't sit there with other people who were quiet and occupied. Instead he stared at the walls without his thoughts really coming together. Somehow Circumstances had to be just right or he got nowhere. He was sensitive like that.

"Room 4 is right next to the bathroom so that's convenient don't you think," Albert offered, pushing

down on the bare mattress on the bed to show that it was comfortable. "You can put up some pictures and get comfortable," he continued.

David answered the obligatory "yes" and walked around the small room pensively. The building was older than Allen Avenue so he sort of wondered if that would be better. David always had a sense that older buildings were a little bit more elegant and more attractive to live in but that wasn't always the case depending on how they were converted to rooms. This room had wood floors which would be good for sweeping up dust which was unlike his room at Allen Avenue which had all-weather carpeting, but the decrepit old dresser table was about the same and all Welcome House rooms were checked regularly for dreaded insects, which were hopefully kept more or less in control.

Soon they all concluded their look at the new room and went back downstairs where someone was sitting next to a large pile of magazines watching TV. Albert and Alicia seemed to know her and ignored her but she spoke up right away to David. "Are you going to live here," she asked brashly, apparently not shy at all.

"Yes, probably," David answered politely before Alicia said, "Nice to meet you," and went back in her office.

"This is a good place to live," the woman in the TV room said, "people are nice,"

Out in the car Albert and David went through the awkward motions of getting in, navigating the narrow parking space and opening the passenger side door

from inside. It was a short ride back to Allen Avenue through the city and David sat and thought about his new prospects. He wondered what his new housemates would be like and he said to Albert, "the person in the TV room seemed nice. I wonder if they have lived at Danforth Street very long?"

"Oh that was Victoria," Albert said, frowning, "She's always around. I think she's been with Welcome House as long as I have so that's 15 years and counting."

David didn't say anything after that and they listened to the AM radio for the rest of the ride. Allen ave. was on the edge of the city in a suburban area and David noted the change between streets that were busy with self-absorbed people of all types and sidewalks where oddballs stuck out a mile away. As they were almost all the way back to the house they spotted Peter walking towards the house on the sidewalk. He looked more energetic than he had lately and Albert thought for a moment they might pick him up and but thought better of it because there was little room in the back and he was almost home anyway. Albert honked the horn which had an odd, defective sound as they passed by.

Soon they were pulling into the driveway and David went back up to his room and Albert went to the office with Rory. David suddenly felt sort of gloomy back in his room because sometimes his other-than- ideal situation got him down. Not working and living a group homes was an awkward situation to account for and it was difficult to confront the open-ended ebullience that self-righteous people with jobs often exhibited. They

felt like their situation was open-ended and had no place to go but up which contrasted sharply with the hesitant precariousness of social support.

David always felt a little closer to homelessness than was comfortable but he knew from experience that social support was actually probably more reliable than wage income which could end for lots of reasons at any time. People focused on the contribution people made but David's perspective was that that much of the work done in a day was trivialities like extra premium dining conveniences or cars which could be replaced by public transportation. It was money that mathematically served as the common denominator. It didn't matter if you earned \$20 for something unimportant or for writing a story or poem; David thought it came down to values.

He didn't stay long in his room and he thought he would ask Albert about the trip back to Danforth Street to join in a community meal sometime. He went down the stairs by the front door and fell in behind Peter who was just coming through the door and apparently headed straight for the office too. "Hi Peter, how's it going," he said.

"Okay I guess, how are you," Peter asked back.

David said he was fine and that they saw him walking on the sidewalk on the way by a few minutes ago. It didn't take long to get into the office where Peter started off by making a big announcement.

"I quit my job," Peter said to Albert and Rory who were dismayed.

"Oh no, what happened," Albert asked. Well I was walking to go down to work like usual and I suddenly thought of some words for a song. I started thinking about it and realized it had been weeks since I wrote a song. That shocked me because I usually wrote a song or two a week and I didn't realize it had been so long, so when I got to Pizza Boy I talked to Brett and told him I couldn't come in. He was bummed. I just need time to write songs. It's important to me."

"Oh man, I wish you had talked to us first. Jeanie is going to be disappointed. Things seemed to be going so well," Albert replied and Rory nodded, "Work is an important part of your future."

At this point David decided to say something because he could completely relate to what Peter was going through. "I would have done that," David said supportively, "work is something that can change the world and it takes people to stick their neck out to affect that. In crises some people just resolve to work harder and bite their lips harder and wait for someone else to do the talking. It's not good for everybody to be like that. I'm no talker but I try to find a voice by writing. That's what writing means to me, a chance to say something you mean. I think people need as many people as possible thinking this way. Work changes. It will get done."

Peter looked at David with relief while Rory and Albert looked troubled. Peter decided to go upstairs and work on his songs, leaving David alone with Rory and Albert. "Do you know when the community dinner is at Danforth street," David asked.

"I think they have them on Thursday," Albert said. "Is next Thursday good for you," he asked.

"Yes I can do next Thursday," David replied and turned and went back upstairs. He felt strange disagreeing so vehemently with Albert and Rory but that was what it was like sometimes and if he had to stick his neck out he would, carefully. There was so much momentum to work and it was often so difficult to get people to work, but David thought that people should have choices about what work they did. Choices improved work and therefore that was a good thing. He felt that writing was a just, reasonable and important activity and he was sure Peter felt the same way about songs. People needed to assert things like this.

He went into his room and tried to think about writing but he knew he was too disrupted from his recent trip and talking to everyone. The next week passed by slowly. Every day he tried to get some writing done but every day he felt blocked and distracted. He knew from experience that the best situation for writing was a whole lot of nothing else to do and few distractions but you had to be comfortable and his life just wasn't all that comfortable right now. Work was different that way too. Work pushed into all sorts of exhausting situations and got things done. He felt strange being so

choosy and picky about how and when he wrote but he was learning that that was a fundamental part of being a productive writer. No one told people who wanted to be a writer about that. They would probably have to stick out as picky and demanding and it was just a fact of life.

When the next Thursday came along, David was excited again to check out Danforth Street and meet some people there. It might be better he thought, living with people who were older and more mature. About 4PM Albert came to his room and got him and they drove across town again in Albert's old car. It was "drive time" on the old AM radio and the news host was engaged in a rant about "welfare" on the conservative talk show that was on. The host started in with, "The president's plan for healthcare amounts to welfare that everybody else has to pay for. Poor people should take better care of themselves and double up to pay expenses Like Noah's Ark. It's just not fair that some people work and pay their bills while others don't."

David grumbled with annoyance at this while they drove. He put in, "That's outrageous, some people look at society with blinders on. They seem to ratify exploitation, even of themselves, because they respond so vehemently to the logic of "pay your own way" and don't see a larger picture where things that "markets" don't completely support or support reluctantly, human beings that are essential to the wellbeing of other people, need to be supported. The problem is that such a large constituency doesn't see human needs as

encompassing anything more than money. You can't eat money. People have to live around each other and money is just a crude way of negotiating needs. If the focus is on money, problems are predictable but oversimplified.”

They were soon at Danforth Street and it was just about dinner time when they got there. David was quiet as people straggled down the stairs to join each other at the table. It was a plain, clumsy, home-cooked dinner which everyone was glad to have. Community meals meant a release from the responsibility of cooking for yourself and everybody welcomed them.

Tonight's dinner was American Chop Suey Alicia had cooked and there was a big pot of Chop Suey in the middle of the table and a loaf of sliced bread and butter to go with it. The first person at the table was Andrea, a woman about 60-years-old who seemed to have likely lived at Welcome House forever. She had short hair and expressive eyes and didn't greet David and Albert when she came to the table. She seemed intent upon the meal.

The next person to come to the table was the person David had met when he came to visit the week before. This was Victoria who was also about 60-years-old and very talkative, overbearing even. "Did you decide you wanted to live here? Chop Suey is good but I wish we had salad," she went on, chattering about David and the meal without waiting for a response. David was amazed that someone could talk so much and he thought about how people all had different chemistry and some

people just talked a lot. Sometimes he wished he talked more but around Victoria around he knew there would never be awkward silences.

Next to come were Ashley and Rob. Rob was about 55 and had a speech impediment so there was an awkward pause every time he was asked a question, although he made up for it in smiles and goodwill. He was always glad to oblige with conversation when he had the opportunity and seemed a little lonely. Ashley was a youngish woman, dark-haired and overweight, who came to the table silently and didn't say anything to anyone as she ate enthusiastically.

The only other person at the table besides Albert didn't introduce themselves either. David later found out their name was Jerry. The person was a large, stern-looking man about David's age whom David recognized from being in hospital at Riverview the year before. In hospital they were sort of quiet and morose and that was how they were here too. David wondered if there were more people in the house as Albert tried to make awkward conversation. Although he usually shared the housemates' food at dinner time at Allen Avenue, he refrained from eating tonight.

"How have you been, Rob," he asked and Rob contorted his face into a big smile as he struggled to start the words of his reply.

"V,v,very well thank you," he replied beaming at the attention.

“This is a good dinner don't you think,” Albert went on, and Rob agreed, “Y,y,yes very good.” Here Victoria interrupted a little a little rudely to say that she wished there were salad and Alicia replied from the open door of the office next to the table that she had forgotten to get lettuce while they were at the store. Alicia sounded a little annoyed with Victoria as if Victoria were a constant source of annoyance but there was little more tension than that as David ate silently and thought to himself that he liked the cookout grill better at Allen Avenue.

People didn't eat together as often at Allen Avenue, but sometimes they had cookouts on the back porch. David didn't know what to think as he sat among his new peers and thought about how miserly the world was with creature comforts and conviviality.

## PART II

8.

### Love and Work

Not long after eating dinner at Danforth Street, David found himself awake at 3AM and listening to rap music. Part of him cringed. He couldn't believe someone didn't have a sense of how edgy, and some might say inappropriate, some music could be. But the music, he was sure it was Peter's, chanted on at full volume down the hall in the middle of the night and David could still clearly hear it even with a pillow over his head. Music was a protected province for people in the house. No one ever complained that it needed to be turned down even at outrageous volume in the middle of the night. Somehow music was an example of personal expression and asking someone to turn it down was like a censure so none of the men of the house did it. David wryly joked to himself that this rapper might be called "N'Shit" because he ended his phrases with those words so

often. No profanity seemed too extreme and as far as he could tell without a lyric sheet no topic was taboo. It was difficult to follow the lyrics but some words came through loud and clear.

To a certain few this music must have been an expression of one's innermost feelings and an advertisement of one's station in life and one's raving masculinity. But despite how it was alien it was to him David knew it took discipline to create it and it was an expression of self-esteem so he thought it was worthy of support and attention. After a while there was silence again and he was grateful. He went to sleep wondering what it must be like to think in raucous terms like that but it clearly mattered to some young men.

Because he usually slept a lot he didn't really miss the sleep he lost when he woke up in the morning. He might have and he did sometimes but instead he was curious about what Peter thought of the music, and after he showered and got dressed and went to get his medication he was in the kitchen making breakfast for himself when Peter came down. He asked Peter right away, "What was that music you were listening to last night?"

"Get Rich or Die Tryin'," Peter answered shortly and David was amazed once again at the edgy succinctness of everything he encountered about rap music.

"Well that certainly makes a point," David replied, "is that your aim with your music?"

"Yes, it's my goal to record some songs on a CD and sell it."

"Commercialization can be a discouraging thing. It's tough to get people to buy things, especially in enough quantity to make money. Have you ever thought of making music just for the sake of your sanity? You know to express yourself?"

"Yeah, but I've got to make enough money to live on. Money makes it seem worthwhile."

"You know, there's not enough music for music's sake in the world. I don't write with the expectation that I'll make money at it. I mean I hope I can make some money at it but I have been around too long to think that making money would be easy. It's more something that I'm open to than something that motivates me. I have tried writing things down that are just meant to sell before. The whole outlook is different. You don't question the status quo, your characters all live effortless, affluent lives. I think there's too much mercantile art around."

"Yeah, we'll see. I don't know what I'm going to do," Peter said a little hesitantly, then continued down the hall to the office to talk to Rory.

David finished eating his breakfast in silence. It was a nice day out and he was glad of it. Upstairs he felt clearheaded and so when he sat on his bed he reached for his notebook and after a deep breath he opened the notebook and started to write.

## Journal

After a while I stopped looking out over the water at the boathouse where the tide was low and the mechanical docks which were designed to float on the surface of the water were at low tide. Sports seemed a million miles away and I wondered how much I looked out of place in my plebeian work clothes. There was a café nearby on the way over to campus and I went there. Standing in line was an older man with white hair wearing a tweed jacket and I imagined he must be a faculty member. I tried to look polite and respectful but somehow I don't think my intentions got past the grease and dust stains on my jacket and I looked like an out-of-place townie in the little bakery that catered to students and faculty at Whitfield. Actually I even got a little annoyed at the man whose detachment bothered me a little although it was probably just my embarrassment that caused the irritation. Freud said, "Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness," and somehow I felt less human than this fellow dressed in neat, comfortable clothes while out to lunch from his elegant job and I resolved to assert my eligible humanness when I got to the counter to talk to the attractive young woman there. If work didn't satisfy me love would have to I thought.

After a few minutes the man looked around and moved aside so I could get to the counter. He went and sat down at a table on the other side of the room and I summoned my most charming smile and stepped up to

the counter with the rows of bottled water standing neatly behind the glass.

"You know I used to go to school here," I said to the young woman who didn't seem to hear what I said as she started in her regular tone asking me what she could get for me. Taken aback a little I rued my plain working man's outfit and said, "Just a bottle of water, please" and then repeated, "I used to go to school here. I had a tweed jacket to go to class in. Do you still get many students in here," I ventured. The young woman, who was kind of attractive I realized, handed me a bottle and said, "You don't look like you went to school here," kind of disinterestedly. "That will be a dollar," she concluded.

I handed her a dollar and realized flirting was out of the question as I turned and made my way out the door with a little bell on it that rang like a gong on "The Gong Show" as I passed through and went back out into the warm sun. It didn't seem right somehow I thought to myself as I started walking towards campus. There was no real difference between myself the student 25 years before and me the working stiff of today but somehow the change in attention and courtesy level seem to resound like a door slamming shut. Was I any less human I asked myself, because my work was less glamorous?

It was like that somehow. People were very shrewd and calculated in their estimation of other people and many people really did count for less. I just wasn't used to it was all. I told myself that I would get used to my new

status but I didn't really believe it. If you grew up to be the president or a professor people paid so much more attention to what you said and did that it was like being on another planet he thought. And it was all an assumption based on grooming and clothes in some situations.

In some ways he thought it really was true, however disappointing it was, that people were different and some people explained and presented their humanity more effectively. It was not so much the clothes as talk and actions, but somehow work really did make a difference to love. As he walked he wondered if this visit to Whitfield was really all that good of an idea. It seems like it was no longer a place that really welcomed him and he was reminded that he was much older now and should be more serious.

There were some children playing in the yard next to campus as he went by and he thought about how Whitfield had been like very grown up child's play when he was there. There was supposed to be a safety net for everyone but he wasn't sure that was the case. For many it seemed like a dress rehearsal for adulthood but for him it was just a hopeful apparition that he never really got over. What it really was a head start for college that had prohibitive costs associated with it.

Walking along he imagined he was visiting an opulent colonial revival college campus and he was amazed at the way that classroom buildings didn't change at all and they made it seem sure that little that took place within them changed either. It was discouraging when

you thought about it because it was the same age-old problems and prejudices that got recreated by new generations being catered to in the same flattering way. It was one thing that facilities were conservative and imposed the same age-old questions like who articulates a conservative point of view to every generation but somehow it seemed like the world should change more from time to time and Aristotle's *zoon politikon* was constantly reverting back to the same old struggles over resources when they could settle resource problems equitably and harness so much more intellectual power. It seemed like having a ruling class made no sense except that resources were so concentrated that only a few people were faced with big philosophical questions of control.

So many people were manipulated into being just tools of luxury and ease and ease was so jealously guarded when it was possible to distribute it as evenly as voting. Continuing to walk down Gilman Street I saw a widespread spontaneous conspiracy to deprive the many of their humanity unless they conservatively ratified the status quo and even one in which many who never dreamed of questioning the order of things were pressed into menial service. The gulf in people's abilities was not that great but somehow the many were cheated into abject service by their healthy reluctance to ambition. It felt strange, I thought, to be so awkwardly left out of so much material optimism. That was what it was somehow. He remembered the days when it all seemed like your peers were the same age but somehow their concerns were not really the same.

In normal school before coming to Whitfield it seemed usual that other students had had their own circumstances which didn't vary that much from my own, but at Whitfield many seemed to bring along their own bubble of alleviated cares from home, wherever that was, and the homely teenage concerns that literally kept me awake at night seemed far away from them. Expensive clothes, expensive hobbies, every security that you could think of seem to envelop people and it puzzled me as I worried about sexual eligibility and relative shabbiness.

That was the thing, people's concerns were different and I remember being impressed so much by how carefree so many students were. For them it was a time long before the pressures of life would kick in and it seemed like to be pleasantly diverted while keeping the gravy train rolling were the only cares. For me I felt like pressures that I still had no idea of were already pressing me in while at the same time all I wanted was to fit in and adopt the same carefree attitude of my fellow students. Everything seemed somehow unreal and looking back I realized that although not completely alone I was probably in a decided minority for whom it was both pressing to do well and for whom the social life of the school seemed out of touch with so much.

As I walked by the library I remembered the first time I had visited, falling asleep and missing class in a comfortable chair, and searching through the carefully selected collection of introductory books that was so different from the town library at home. To me it just

didn't seem very grounded somehow to have such facilities and I found myself sampling things tentatively more often than applying myself with seriousness like some of my acquaintances who had attended special schools since grade school.

Looking back I had a keen sense still of my sense of alienation from it all and now things like mental illness had been come up and I was more oriented than ever to a different place and time. It seems somehow that today on my work lunch break there was more pull than ever to the contrasting circumstances of school but at the same time a sharp weariness like being tired around an apparently benign boa constrictor but feeling apprehensive anyway.

I knew where I was heading for and my pace slowed a little as I came near my destination. I was headed for MacMillan hall, a relatively small dormitory for about 30 students that was located just behind the library and the Elm Street dining hall. It was a relatively small, modern building that had a sort of common area made of concrete and bricks out in front. I was glad that nobody was around but on this lovely late Spring day I was reminded of similar Spring days back when I was a student and people came out to sunbathe on the old green benches that sat out and you could watch the other students going by on their way to and from the gymnasium.

I felt both out of place and filled with memories as I sat down on a bench and got out my lunch. Things had been so optimistic back then and it seemed to me my life had

been all downhill ever since. It was an illusion really because I never really had any real money or status independently while I was a student but living the student's life seemed like privilege and like I was experiencing the beginning of great things. Little did I know of how things were destined to turn out.

As I contentedly ate my lunch, relieved to be taking a break from my day's errand, I thought more about what school had been like and remembered how students would play frisbee golf in the trees scattered about on the lawn between the dormitories. To be at the school seemed like an aberration from the coercive drudgery and boredom of the world and back then I had happily adopted the busy new lifestyle that came with it. At first the boa constrictor had seemed like a curious pet.

What I didn't realize was that for reasons that remained a mystery to this day I was as helpless and unprepared for the eventual events that happened as the silent victim of a giant snake. Was it that I grew up with without models at home for intellectual endeavor and I was overwhelmed by the welcome but difficult challenges of a whole new lifestyle? Or was it that I was doomed to failure in any undertaking because I just didn't bring the stability and social skills to my efforts that most people brought? Or was it not the intellectual challenges of school but the drunken elephant in the room of financial disparities of people and the opening up without buffers of a whole new world of challenges that were little talked about and less compensated for in society at large? He still didn't know the answer but

being at Whitfield made the problems seem clear and present.

Whitfield was about twice as large a high school as the school I came from and it was all college preparatory. It was also a lot closer to Boston than the tiny rural Maine town I came from. Students came from New York City and Washington DC and I was completely lost in the levels of sophistication that I encountered. There were children of oil tycoons, multinational brewers, politicians and countless sons and daughters of successful lawyers and doctors. Whitfield was imagined as a sort of pre-college utopia with representatives from everywhere and all walks of life. My imagination was bowled over and my personal and social resources were stretched to their limits.

What was striking about the Whitfield student body was not so much their diversity, which was real and extensive, as their spontaneous homogeneity which rallied around wealth and ambition. To me and my small town, rural, churchgoing background riches had a generous component of modesty and embarrassment. This was not so to the wealthier element of the Whitfield population who couldn't have been more at home mentioning their boating in the Mediterranean, their ski vacations in the Alps, or flying back and forth to the Middle East and Orient for school breaks. I was amazed at what a tour de force social issue wealth was and how diminutive and retiring I felt with my humble origins. I was a confident teenager but this sort of thing squashed me.

I began to have a sense of what an all-encompassing issue royalty was and the way it cleared the decks for all manners of self-importance although I knew no actual Royal titles at Whitfield. I realized that the divine right of kings was the preeminence of extraordinary wealth and that historically if someone became wealthy enough they were certainly qualified to become king.

Only to complicate matters further was the issue of genes. Some of the highest-testing most talented students to be found anywhere were students at Whitfield. It was a culture where those who could afford the experience surrounded themselves with all manner of good students. To me this was as influential as the wealth of many students and I unfortunately learned to associate talent with wealth. I say unfortunately because it was my experience later to make a lot of foolish choices about money in college and graduate school as I attempted to reassemble the elements of my Whitfield situation to become as productive as possible. What I didn't realize was that frugality was often an important component of success for people working their way to the top and I made an imprudent crutch out of all the resources I could gather together. The experience of a talented community would have been different if I had been at something like a regional magnet school but the 1980s in Maine were a time and place before that idea.

Talented genes are a fundamental part of the way society is structured with society exploiting as much as possible the talent it encourages in young people. But

introducing fragile young people to the forces of wealth culture at an early age is really upsetting. Young people who already have unusual expectations of themselves are impossibly burdened with social demands that warp their sense of advanced culture. Schools like Whitfield readily sell the experience of the diverse and talented young people they attract and in my experience it was easy to become burdened with a lot of collateral expectations.

I found out the difficult truths both that wealth comes with extreme personal expectations and that wealth is overwhelming as it truly bullies its way forward or backward or whichever way it wishes to go. My reflection was that wealth, however implacable and transient its influences were was an influence that artificially propped up an unnecessary and destructive sort of pyramid form to culture that it would be best to live without. This was not to say that some wealthy people weren't very personable, even nice, people who went far in apologizing for the excesses for the inequities they represented, but however successfully you apologize for it wealth was doing an injustice to society. So many people connect their own experience to comfort with the justification of the excessive privilege of a few that the two separate phenomena are often conflated as being the same interest. They are not, it would be my conclusion based on the experience of Whitfield.

Sitting in the sun and eating, my lunch was flooded with impressions from my time at Whitfield and I had a clear

memory of how awkward and out of place I felt much of the time. People walked by and politely made their way along without noticing me. I imagine that some of the Summer school or something was in session because I saw a group of young people walking back from the gym. There were about a dozen people walking together and they were boisterously talking and laughing. A small group of girls at the front of the group were surrounded enthusiastically by as many boys who talked enthusiastically apparently trying to impress them. I was reminded of how forbidding dating was at Whitfield and the way that with a few notable exceptions most people who seemed eligible kind of kept to themselves and romance was rare. It always seemed to me to be the function of the privilege and comfortable social circumstances of Whitfield and the way boarding school provided a comprehensive sort of social experience that was unlike living at home with one's parents. In many ways people didn't grow up as fast when they weren't trying to escape the influence of their parents and they didn't seem to be as interested in pairing off in convenient economic pairs the way many people in public school did.

At Whitfield social eligibility seemed much more complex and the same old rules of sexual attraction didn't seem to apply. There were some students who had gone to international boarding schools ever since they were grade schoolers and many people like this seemed extraordinarily chaste and conservative. After the group of youth passed by I was pensive for a few moments, lost in my thoughts, then I noticed out of the

corner of my eye someone dressed in a coat and tie, an adult, walking on a nearby sidewalk through the trees and I imagined they must be a faculty member. As they spotted me they were near enough that I could see that they were rolling their eyes in censure and amazement. At first I couldn't think what it was except my strange appearance but then I remembered that MacMillan Hall had been turned into a girl's dormitory in the years after I left and too late I realized that my presence probably recalled to some the circumstances of the change. But they clearly took notice of me and I felt like a ruffian from the past who was on the verge of getting in trouble for their brazen manners.

I brazenly watched as the faculty member walked away and as I was watched I noticed two girls who had spread out a blanket on the lawn about 200 yards away and were laying on the blanket, talking and reading. During the school year the place was too busy to sunbathe in that area of the lawn so I wondered a little what the girls were doing as I decided to light up a cigarette and finish my break. Soon I was smoking contentedly and soaking up the sunwashed scene with the two tomboyish girls who didn't pay much attention to me, but my reverie was soon broken. Someone dressed as a groundskeeper suddenly drove up and stopped in a golf cart with shovels arranged in the back and said sharply, "There's no smoking here. You're trespassing," and jumped out to confront me.

I wasn't really looking for trouble although it was true that I was reveling in my ruffian persona now since I had

felt so marginalized in my school days back at Whitfield, so I immediately calmly put my cigarette out and said in my most conciliatory voice, "I used to go to school here. Is there still a butt room downstairs?"

The irate custodian's manner immediately changed to one of indignant puzzlement as I took my work boots down off the brick wall in front of Macmillan Hall and sat up and put my lunch away in my backpack. "Well you still can't smoke here," he continued, unsure about whether he should treat me as a welcome guest or continue with the bum's rush. The latter looked like it made more sense with my work shirt and uniform jeans hardly making me look like the comfortable, successful alumnus that the admissions brochure advertised.

I decided I had better get going since my lunch was finished and I really had no business there except nostalgia, and I stood up slowly with dignity and said, "Have a good day," as I left and started walking back across campus to where I had parked my truck. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the two girls sitting up and watching the exchange attentively while the custodian stood next to the golf cart with his hands on his hips for a minute, watching me leave until I was clearly on my way.

As I walked away it occurred to me that this was one of the things that had made me feel out of place at Whitfield. So many people were used to the privileged, "best manners" sort of decorum of Whitfield while to me it was strange to always keep in mind the groundskeepers and custodians who were at work since

I had more in common with them than I did with my Whitfield peers. I grew up groundskeeping at a nearby cemetery which my father took care of while I was a kid and the closest my family had ever come to private school was my great-grandfather who was a custodian at a school long before I was born.

Somehow it wasn't a very easy thing to step from the blue collar world I was born into to the semicomfortable, finicky world of privileged decorum that my student test scores had gotten me into. For one thing you needed a safety net for your behavior to endure very long I thought. It was one thing to be well behaved and relatively prudent about staying out of trouble but it was another whole level to be able to reassure custodians that decorum wasn't being violated when the slightest disruption occurred. It was tempting to say that workers were often like sleeping pets in situations like that and I also felt how the slightest disruption also made them restless. But I knew too well that they were people just eager to help.

Privileged people didn't always share their sense of aloof calm with others and while I knew that workers' anxiety revolved around things like job security the self-important unpredictability of some who were impolitic with power didn't always take this into account. There was a pecking order I thought and this was improper. It seemed to me that egalitarian relations were too often a mere pretense. In a better world both workers' anxiety would be lessened as well as the power differential of the privileged. I kept walking and

hesitantly admired the anachronistic architecture of the old campus.

9.

Here's The Keys

Journal

As I walked I felt like a royal nobleman of old surveying the lives of the many peasants laboring to build a massive cathedral or some other large building in the past. Guilt threatened to overwhelm me, but then I reminded myself that the social challenges of inequity where nothing new in the world. I wished endlessly to be more personable and always a little more easy-going as I found myself the reluctant defender of a social order that benefited me only in limited ways.

That was one of the challenges that I didn't know if I lived up to or not going to Whitfield. On a basic level cheerfulness and optimism were much easier if a person's financial situation was easygoing and a sort of ubiquitous strain that seemed tug every corner of social

existence came with austerity. Exertion was a real social impediment which made cheerful goodwill often a laborious choice that people freed from exertion didn't realize was behind the taciturn grumpiness of many who wore blue collars. Humility, for both rich and poor, made friendliness easier and more effective but had its drawbacks for accomplishment that created a sort of barrel that I found it difficult to get over.

Jesus's reputed endless generosity was no respecter of persons but most people find it necessary to cut corners in their dealings with people of all different backgrounds. It seemed to me that in the crush of doing things people often became imperious or did the opposite, they became sort of mute. Either way was really an attempt to expedite exertion, on the one hand the emotional and personal exertion of trying to foster consensus in agreement on the one hand and on the other sheer physical exertion. There was certainly a middle ground and in many ways the combination of the two was both the more difficult.

Places like Whitfield brought together a lopsided experience of introduction to immersion in the interpersonal dimensions of society. I had always had a hard time summoning the nerve to be imperious and represent myself and my causes firmly and it was always a temptation to remain silent and compliant making myself useful in the more physical realm. It was deceptive and unfair, I thought, to consider simple physical exertion to be less valuable.

It was entirely only that physical exertion was easier to elicit that made the compensation for it less, I thought. To me it seemed like it was low-minded expediency alone that reduced the cost of physical exertion. The world seemed to give up on so many when it came up came to teaching interpersonal skills.

I imagined that it was often the result of quiet resentment that made so many contrarians out of otherwise humble people. I imagined to myself what it would be like if all things were equal. People negotiate for everything from a young age I thought. They would see circumstances as less infinitely liquid if they were equal I thought. To me imagining a world that supported all people equally as a basic requirement of existence, banishing anxieties about food, housing and health care instead of advocating for an equal but lopsided “chance” for everybody was imperative.

People placed so much faith in providing a “chance” for people to fulfill their potential advantages that they failed to see the forest for the trees. Anxiety was crippling to all people and angling for better opportunities was really just manipulating people all the more to fish for the most mercenary among them. The world really contented itself with only preserving the status quo and only promoting people between classes for exemplary service to the status quo. I felt the world could be a more productive, creative and happier place than that. Just because large numbers of people could be coerced into menial labor didn't mean that was the best way to structure the world.

As I made it back across the now unwelcoming campus and approached the truck I had parked I thought about the dismal pay I received for doing my not so difficult or objectionable job. It didn't measure up to the cost of living and I was basically being exploited to do something for less pay than it cost a single person to live to do the job. It didn't occur to me to complain about not making a lot of money, that was reserved as a reward for extraordinary effort, but it deeply troubled me to work full time and not receive enough money to get by.

I retrieved the key to the brightly painted moving truck from my pocket and opened the door. It seemed to me almost like the tiny ransom I was paid was in exchange for small social commitment, and the EZ Move company would pay as little as possible forever to accomplish its modest ends. The number of men, young and old, who would choose the gendered dignity of maintaining the brute impressiveness of trucks was seemingly endless and as long as people kept showing up wages wouldn't rise.

Things had changed for me, sort of, there was no doubt, although I couldn't shake the sense that failure was my responsibility. It was a feature of evolution, I thought, that people had an implacable impulse to busy themselves and in itself it was difficult to question the idea that most people should join in the work of the world and work together to accomplish what needed to be done. But it seemed to me that the pellmell consensus about what needed to be done was deeply

flawed. If your parents for instance were filled with a sense of urgency about something that needed to be done, living arrangements, restaurant service, cars and private transportation among so many other things, so many familiar impulses to activity overlapped with busy work to a great degree. Work was calculated to keep otherwise troublesome familiar idleness at bay.

“Impress me” seemed to be the prevailing sentiment when it came to creativity and so many of the activities proposed to young people in education were pushed immediately to the wayside upon reaching adulthood. It was tyranny really because so many things that address stress and problem-solving and humanity were rejected as not being “worth the money” and small-minded greed easily won out in the battle for people's energy.

My focus was drawn back to my task as I got ready to drive the truck I was in and briefly checked the map for information about where I was driving. It felt like all my attention to daydreaming was a hazard as I turned the key and started up the truck to get going. Somehow all my good intentions were lost and I

became a tool in the service of making a profit.

It made me feel like a failure really; all the early lip service I had paid toward high ideals and garnering respect socially were for nothing. I felt like the lofty ideals of Whitfield which came up as soon as the floor was open for comment were a difficult and lofty goal even if a person had a lot of advantages going for them.

Lifelong learning, an open attitude, and concentrated effort were difficult even if your fundamental living expenses weren't a worry, but with no living situation or pocket money they were really nearly impossible. As I pulled out into the street again I felt uniquely positioned to perceive all these things and I felt sort of proud of myself even if I was pretty confused and discouraged. Driving had a sort of natural thought-rhythm to it and I found myself paying attention to the road while my thoughts continued to drift easily with a sort of zen focus. I wondered what I would do when I got to the other garage and what it would be like there. The Portland garage of EZ Move was a big place I thought and I wondered if the Manchester lot was as big. So far the truck had driven well with no problems so I considered myself lucky and thought of my phone stashed in my backpack.

It was strange how no one was going to ask my opinion on anything more weighty than how the truck was running and I felt strangely light as I steered my way through traffic. Responsibility was fairly easy I thought and it was a different not having a very impressive job. I remember briefly how at a cafe after work a few months before I had been talking to a woman who knew my boss and the story of my meeting the woman at the cafe had gotten back to him in some fashion, making me feel like it was a very small world and I couldn't get away from my work identity no matter how hard I tried.

The encounter at the cafe where there was a Whitfield faculty member had been similar and I thought to

myself how I never seem to carry enough responsibility on my own. I thought to myself how love and romance seemed to transcend occupational identities despite information channels and wondered what people would be like if they didn't have that escape. Myself I sort of imagined how people would completely abandon the escape of romance or completely depend on it for a sort of alternate identity. I thought of how romance was invented in literature and occupied the sort of secondary place before Hellenistic literature evolved in ancient Greece. To me it seemed like romance was a province all its own that was optional depending on how much influence you chose to give it. At the moment I was giving romance a lot of sway in my life but your job position was something that you had to defer to. That was always a consideration I thought and I considered further how romance was a feature of a sort of middle class. It was not that romance didn't exist in an upper class, but rather that romance became such an important thing in itself in a middle class and such an important area of economic negotiation.

People compensated for all sorts of shortcomings and demanded attention for all sorts of strengths in romance I thought. But the real key was that people got personal attention. In the occupational world money was a sort of impersonal panacea where even people who weren't especially cold or distant became depersonalized and transactional. It was like people couldn't possibly evolve to interact with so many others in the course of a day but they did anyway just because money made it possible. It wasn't efficiency. It was

laziness about people and turning people into tools that didn't talk back except formulaically and briefly.

The one antidote to impersonality was art, literature especially, because there people tried to sketch in the larger dimensions of life and the irreplaceable feelings that went with personal interaction. It was like the world tried to compartmentalize social behavior because it refused to resist the urge to conduct business on a large scale I thought. People became contorted on a large scale even if there were more personal dimensions to their behavior. I remember being a teaching assistant in college and the way that I felt stretched thin in dealing with so many students. It was so different driving a truck around and doing maintenance. In the former instance I found myself resorting to condescension and brusque attitudes to try and limit interactions with students who were full of energy for attention while in the latter situation I found myself dealing with people who simply didn't think about anything but the most spare and spartan of words to accompany actions. I felt like a failure at both somehow although the simplicity of EZ Move troubled me a lot less. "People were different" seemed to be a blanket understanding that succeeded in paying attention to the personal elements of interaction, while leaving one free to keep up with other responsibilities. That was the thing I thought, money was all the same and instead of treating it as if it were the solution to boredom and dissatisfaction it should be handled differently. People's basic needs should be assured so they were free to have personal interests instead of

subordinating everything to a person's means of support.

People sort of greased the way past each other by adding money to their dealings, and they thought to themselves that even if I don't like a person or pay any attention to them as a person still there's money and support in the transaction. Money is a completely different thing when basic needs are met and a person is not negotiating daily for essential things. When transactions are optional regular people have some breathing space like the rich. Changes like this would revolutionize the world I thought.

The miles flew by in the steady, impersonal world of highway traffic and I soon got close to where I was going. There was no paying attention to my appearance or what I was going to say that accompanied my reaching the garage. It was a lot at the side of the road surrounded by trees that gave the place a sort of rural feel. I pulled up and drove once around the yard looking for a place to park. There were moving trucks and trailers everywhere, all brightly painted with an EZ Move design so they each were a moving billboard for the company. A large matching sign rose out by the highway announcing "Truck Rentals" and "Trailer Rentals." I found an out of the way spot and stopped the truck, gathered up my backpack and the keys and got out.

The truck radiated heat and creaked in the sun's stillness where I left it to walk over to the front doors of the main building and when I went in there were

two men there behind a long service counter. One was talking on the phone and another was talking to a customer so I paused to wait in line and find out about the truck I was to drive back.

"Yes, we have a bunch of 17 Footers available," the man on the phone said. He was a medium-sized man with dark hair and plain glasses, wearing an EZ Move uniform shirt with a name patch that said "Eric." He looked like many other men about his age, which was about 40, and it was difficult to discern much about him unless you guessed from experience that he was probably a man with a family and responsibilities that had worked for EZ Move for quite a while. That would be pretty likely if he was an EZ Move manager.

I was often reminded of my father by the men of EZ Move who paid modest mortgages and were steadfastly reliable.

"What can I do for you," he asked abruptly, putting down the phone for a moment.

"I have a truck from Portland. Here's the keys."

"Oh, okay, take this one back, it's parked out back."

"Oh thanks, " I said as the man got back on the phone, and I went back out the door to look for the truck. There were dozens of trucks out back and I checked all the numbers against the numbers on the tag until I found the matching one. It was an older truck that seemed to be in okay shape I thought as I unlocked the door and got in.

From all my time at EZ Move, which was going on a few months now, I had never had much more complex interactions with anyone than I had with the fellows here in New Hampshire. In a way I was glad of it because it left me a little more functional in my off hours to imagine things I longed to do like write. In other ways though it was a forerunner to disaster because what I was really trying to do with myself in those days was build a life like people supposed to be normal for functioning adults to have. I wanted work to be cool and self-contained so I could get a romantic life on my off hours. It had been a long, eventful Odyssey since my previous attempt at a serious life. More than anything I wanted to leave behind any taint of mental illness and I had stopped taking medication a year before. Somehow the years in college and trying to enlist in the military after it seemed like an aberration, a distraction.

Maybe it was just me, I thought, maybe I was abnormal or just wasn't cut out for these things. I just couldn't be sure but it all seemed to trace back to Whitfield. Whitfield had been the years when I first got ambitions in my head that looked very different from what my parents had done. Whitfield was different in the sense that I was trying to do something my parents hadn't done. Most of the other students at Whitfield were trying to live up to their parents' examples and some had some pretty big shoes to fill. On the other hand I felt like I had a completely blank slate that I could fill up in any way I wanted. Retrospectively Whitfield wasn't very good for that. Whitfield was good for ratifying

success as a foregone conclusion and anything else was just a costly aberration.

I started up the truck and fiddled with the radio a minute. The radio was set to a local station already so I left it on as I pulled out of the yard and past the sign and back out onto the highway. I always felt secretive thinking of Whitfield because in New Hampshire everyone had heard of Whitfield and assumed it was only for rich kids. I usually kept the fact that I had gone there to myself for this reason and it was a fact I had only shared selectively. Like mental illness, no one at work knew anything about it.

It was a juggling act I had kept up ever since my teenage years and I wondered if other people were just better at juggling than me. To me it seemed like life should come together a lot more easily than it did. I

expected to make the effort but my memories of times when I could spend all my time studying or writing haunted me. It just didn't seem natural to me to go through the distracted motions of activities I didn't feel an emotional commitment to. I felt that people's lives should have enthusiasm and care and that empty jumping high enough to make money only for the reason of going along with large numbers of people was the recipe for disaster.

It was strange to me really to think how many people didn't question what they did with their days or how it fit in with their larger world. The answer was probably that they were finding love and that what they really

wanted out of life was a little more time with their partner. There was a sexy, edgy song on the radio on the station out of Boston and I reflected how things were just the sort of predetermined to cater to the common denominators of motivation as the station kind of faded into the distance and the miles passed on the way back to Portland. In the best of all possible worlds I would have love and a satisfying job. It didn't seem like a lot to expect.

I glanced at my watch and tried to time my trip to the end of the work day which was fast approaching. If I made it back to the shop by 3:45 I would be in time to punch out at 4PM and then I could head out to a cafe and relax for a while. They wouldn't be anything in particular to do before I left and I had a clean shirt in my backpack. I felt sort of like I was looking for trouble in my off hours because I didn't spend any time at home. Instead I went to coffee houses before and after work and carried with me a book to study. I imagine that hot girls were everywhere just hoping to meet a barely-employed goofy-looking 30something truck driver.

Back at Portland the sun was out and it was hot. It had been a long day of driving but I realized there wasn't much going on at the lot. It was another slow day. The garage was still open because EZ Move stayed open into the evening although I was scheduled to finish up at 4PM. I the washed the grease off my hands and splashed water on my face to wash the dust off and punched out and started walking downtown. Quitting time always seemed like a liberation because work was

so dull. As I walked, because I walked everywhere although I had a car, I slowly transformed into someone I thought was a different person. I recalled my student days and thought of the world as a different place than the easy going, matter-of-fact world of trucks and garages that I had been in for the last eight hours. It always irked me how some so much time and energy was used up making conveniences when the world refused in many ways to work together on its limited, creative and intellectual endeavors. What I resented was the high bar that was set for any kind of compensation for these things.

Part of things like this were inevitable. In my pack I carried an introductory grammar to Arabic and some notes that I had made beginning to learn the alphabet. Doing things like this in my spare time partly out of curiosity and partly to impress girls, made me feel like my time wasn't used very well in driving trucks although it was easy and independent. I had always had a sort of idea of an intellectual, creative working man that I pursued but I realized was in many ways not especially attainable.

Time, concentration and dust made some activities somewhat impractical for a laborer. The ideal I sought resided more in a sort of treasury of experience where a person who acted intellectually also had some sense of what manual labor was like. Mechanics associations and all sorts of utopian impulses from the earlier 20th century had all sorts of valuable insights and archaic dispositions but they were somewhat left behind by

television and radio technology. There simply was no time to indulge in all these things although I had an impulse to take in everything.

Despite the afternoon heat the walk was refreshing and I soon reached the cafe downtown where I spent my off hours. It was a cafe and bookstore located in a building with a video rental store and I liked the place immensely. It was spacious and open with high ceilings and tables strewn around. Everything was elegant and cool and it was really a place that attracted clientele to come in and hang out in a sort of cafe culture. There were a lot of young people who reminded me of my days as a young person myself when I would drive 20 minutes to visit downtown Portland to go to a cafe there.

It was one of the first things I did when I was becoming independent and I remember they were always a few older people who frequented the cafe scene too. The place didn't really have a name that was prominent. It was called "The Bookstore" or something like that and when I got in there were only a few people sitting around in the late afternoon. It was sort of a pickup scene I thought so I scanned the place for eligible women and when I didn't see any I took up a seat by the window then I got in line for the counter. When I went there I brought some tea bags and asked for hot water to make tea. It was economical this way and I bought some cookies to have with my tea.

It took a little while to relax and concentrate with my tea but soon I was stretched out on one of the shiny

aluminum chairs they had and copying out the Arabic alphabet to try and introduce myself to it. It was exciting and exotic and I thought it was a good compliment to my Greek studies in college. I longed for learned study but it was the enigma of my life to contemplate why going to school alone had not resulted in succeeding in starting an intellectual career. I called them "the sophist trades" and I had failed disastrously when I went to college. I never realized that getting good grades in school was not enough to get one started in a career. Instead the bar was much higher and the little cocoon of high hopes that surrounded me in school was summarily destroyed when it came to exam time. My entire sense that the world was meaningful and benevolent and that I was a worthy participant in it was destroyed.

I was on my best romantic behavior at the cafe and I watched the other people there and imagined their lifestyle. Most were very young so they came in from school or work and likely still had to live with their parents. The young girls were nice and polite and the young men were standoffish and suspicious of an older man hanging out. I tried to be a sort of example like some older people had been for me when I was younger and hanging out in cafes but I was aware that life as an EZ Move truck driver didn't really necessarily measure up to many young people's idea of a future. I remember talking to one young woman when I was sort of fantastically dressed in tweedy clothes, a lot like the Whitfield teacher actually, that I got a thrift store. I wore my glasses and carried my books and I imagined

that I was a successful respectable adult on my day off but the young woman wasn't fooled despite all my sincerity.

"Do you have a job," she asked, noting my outfit.

"Yes, I drive trucks," I replied, "moving trucks."

"Oh where," she had asked, puzzled at the strange figure I presented and probably wondering if I was a little off my rocker which officially I was although I got around okay without getting into too much trouble.

"Oh the EZ Move company, down by the highway. I've been there a few months now."

"Do you like it?"

"Well to be honest really not a lot. It's not a really good fit for me personally. I like to read and write and study."

"Did you go to college?"

"Yes I went to Wheaton University."

"What did you study?"

"Classics; Greek and Latin, and English. It didn't really work out the way I hoped it would. I wanted to be like a professor or teacher or something but I was really unprepared, socially I guess. It was a lot more complicated and demanding than I imagined it was at your age. In fact at your age I really didn't give it much thought."

"Oh well, you look nice, good luck with your job."

With that she turned back to her book and didn't say anything else.

But today there was no one to talk to and I continued studying my Arabic alphabet and admired my work myself. Soon my tea was about gone and I finished my cookies. I felt refreshed and no longer dusty and hot and numb from my day on the road in New Hampshire. At about 6PM I decided to finish up and I packed up my books and my tea cup and headed home for the day.

10.

Friends

### Journal

When I was 18 I drove around in an old blue pickup truck that my father let me use to go to work, run errands, and generally just get out of the house where I was moping around after having quit high school for the second time without graduating. I was high on independence and short on cash and I spent most of my time hanging out with local friends and generally just strutting around invisibly in broad daylight the way that young people are present in many places but ignored and presumed innocent until trouble happens. I worked at my father's insistence at a restaurant at the Maine Mall where I was a fry cook and I made enough for gas money. I learned a lot on the job about cooking, which was a handy skill because for the first time in my life I

found myself worrying about eating as I tried to avoid my parents house.

Smoking and my age calmed most of my impulses to eat and I often skipped meals, anxious about idleness in the way that most people are, but I was strangely more anxious about writing which I thought about a lot but didn't do much of. I was sort of a strange latchkey type kid who was being pressed into adulthood quickly. What I should have been doing was either planning a short year off or applying to and going to college to keep myself on track for a well-compensated, dignified career but I had little sense of this and my parents had even less.

My parents were probably thinking of their own experience in different circumstances in a different generation and remembered going to work and getting married at about that time in their lives. I felt like an exception, having gotten lots of attention in high school and the preceding years and sure of few things except that I wanted to be a writer and that this was adventurous, unlike my parents lives. I also didn't have a steady girlfriend, unlike my guy friends who only spent time with me when they weren't with their girlfriends. I dated and had sex but in what was probably a harbinger of things to come I seldom formed relationships that were steadier than a few dates.

The one thing I had going for me was the pickup truck which my father generously let me use and I drove around, often great distances just to wander to pass the time. Even in those days with friends and dates and

work what I still remember the most are the times alone. I was sort of a student without a school I remember and I would sometimes drive the hour it took to get down to Whitfield just to visit campus and feel like I belonged somewhere even though I had dropped out months before.

It was on one of these trips back to Whitfield that I parked my truck and got out to walk around by the Whitfield chapel, which was a sturdy, stone Gothic structure out on Front Street. It was late Spring and early Summer again and I had no purpose for being there except to sort of gravitate back to my old haunts. It was like the driving by that I often did at the high school back in Maine, which I did restlessly from time to time to evoke generally positive memories. That day I was sitting on a bench scrutinizing the graffiti that people had carved into it and was quietly passing the time when a slim figure came into view walking nearby on the sidewalk. I immediately recognized the figure and looked away modestly hoping I wouldn't be recognized but it was too late and Ms. Phillips, my introduction to philosophy teacher and the assistant Rector of Whitfield Church walked by and said hello. She was an angular, androgynous looking woman who didn't wear her clerical collar all the time although she was an ordained minister. I immediately felt shy in response to her friendly, "Hi David," remembering my name from class, because I didn't go to church regularly at Whitfield, and I quietly said hello back. When she stopped and asked how I was doing I replied that I drove from home to visit campus and that I was alone.

Ms. Phillips probably wasn't aware that I had dropped out of school but that didn't diminish her polite concern for me and she immediately said that she was just headed back home to have lunch and asked if I would like to join her for some leftovers. I was just out wandering in search of attention really so I replied that yes I would be glad to join her and I got up from the bench where I was sitting and walked along with her for a short way back to a nearby house where she was staying during her time as Assistant Rector at Whitfield Church. It didn't occur to me at the time that she was working as she talked about other students I might know and brought me up to date on all the church gossip that I wasn't used to hearing. She said that Alexander Harris was traveling to Katmandu after finishing up his senior year and that the renovations to Whitfield Church were coming along just fine. Soon we came back to her kitchen and she graciously shared a little casserole with me and I didn't realize it but I was actually hungry. At home and school meals were always provided three times a day on a regular schedule and being left without a schedule I wasn't learning very quickly to feed myself and avoid the self-consuming funk that came with hunger.

Her kitchen was small and plain and I marveled that someone could be so generous and affable as she asked if I had any plans for the for the Summer, to which I replied that I was trying to write and that I was still interested in philosophy after taking her class. There was always such a gulf between my day-to-day life and my cultural ambitions which had been nurtured at

Whitfield. It was like there was a first rung of the ladder to climb up and get started intellectually and for a lot of reasons I was having trouble clambering up.

I wanted to tell her something silly like that I was overcome with ennui thinking about the existentialist philosophy that we read about in class or that despair seemed to overwhelm me sometimes, but I kept those things to myself. I wondered if she remembered the essay I wrote proving that knowledge was impossible but I doubted that she did. I wanted to just be neutral and polite but I was really impressed by what seemed to me to be the novelty of being a woman clergy person. I had never met another woman who was a cleric in the church I had gone to as a child although the most religious people in my family and the people responsible for taking me to church were women.

It was a short, polite lunch and when I left I was sort of staggered by the encounter. Things like that didn't happen every day I thought as I walked back to where my truck was parked. I felt strangely both initiated at Whitfield and deeply alien to all the goodwill and good intentions there. They were hard to keep up with and measure yourself against while living in the hard-working, humble, plain world of my parents' house.

Back in my truck I sat for a moment behind the wheel and had a cigarette. Cigarettes only increased my sense of distance from Whitfield and the other people there and only deepened the sort of existential despair that I felt. It was like the vigorous, positive academic culture I was lucky to be introduced to was countered directly by

a sense of hesitation and lethargy that I reveled in. Working-class, gruff pessimism didn't throw itself very far into that new adult world although I felt a sort of glimmer of the inspiration.

I knew the landmarks on the road back home well from all the drives I had taken back and forth to visit Whitfield and I checked them off on the drive home. There were corner stores and railroad crossings and town centers, all sort of rural and small town Maine and I felt further alienated from Whitfield where many people had New York City addresses and were just playing social wiffle ball I thought in places like this in Summer. I imagined that I wouldn't have done all that well in a city as a kid perhaps but I really didn't know.

Back home I had a work shift to do that evening and I tried to squeeze my lofty thoughts into a kitchen work shirt and apron and be of use at the kitchen where I worked. Somehow I felt like the casual leisure like the environment that the minister had for work was where I belonged but I didn't know if I had the personality or confidence to carry off her work persona. It seems like my working caste background somehow stood in the way of so much optimistic spontaneity. I had never really thought about having a vocation for the priesthood but in some ways that spoke to a part of my personality that was underrepresented in my current life. Deep subjects held me transfixed and somehow I thought that if I had just internalized a culture of study a little more it might have occurred to me to be a cleric.

All the ethical responsibilities of being a priest would just come to me I thought unrealistically.

People varied in their personalities so much I thought as I cooked french fries and made sandwiches, but I had been formally encouraged to consider intellectual pursuits and that made a difference I thought. It was like peoples' mindsets had boundaries and some peoples' stretched further. It never really occurred to me that social skills and intellectual skills had to be learned or that they were a labor. I saw esoteric endeavors through my parents' eyes and saw mostly ethical responsibilities, which were a simple personal choice to my unrealistic thinking, and privileges, which were mostly luck.

I had few examples except those I encountered in school, which usually seemed distant and impersonal, of the sort of whole-life commitment to a position that many professionals exhibited. Some people embraced this from early in life and I sort of did but I had so many social obstacles I found myself distracted as soon as some sorts of opportunities presented themselves. It was like the differences between partying at home and away at school. Somehow it really usually seemed so much more mundane and sordid at home with old cars and limited supplies, but away at school surreptitious events behind closed doors and hidden securely away seemed almost glamorous.

After work I drove home directly as I always did when I finally had to drift home to my parents' house. It was such a strange sort of life to be in. It was sort of like

being in limbo with no place secure and completely welcoming to you. Coming home your parents didn't completely reject you but they were intent on introducing you to the rigors of independent life and starting at the bottom of life was difficult. I just couldn't believe all the academic lead up to those years of my life was coming to so little attention and so much unglamorous drudgery to take in stride.

One friend who seemed to be escaping from these problems was Bill, who had gone to college early from high school and was studying acting. He had accomplished the break early from high school and was deep in the throes of college and summer stock theater in that Summer when we were 18. In the morning I went downstairs to the phone in my parents' house and called him to see if anything was going on.

"Hey man," he answered familiarly, always upbeat and charismatic, something that I found so different than myself.

"What's going on," I asked, checking in to see since I hadn't really talked to him for a while. It was about time for his school to finish for the Summer so I thought he would be home.

"Hey look, I'm having some friends from school up to camp if you want to come visit. We're going to be in town for a week."

"Oh that sounds great, I'll come up after work tonight and meet everyone." I knew some of Bill's college friends from visiting him at college and looked forward

to seeing them again. I was ecstatic that something was going on and finally I would have something to do other than roam aimlessly when I wasn't working.

"Okay see you then big guy," he said and hung up. I put down the phone and made some breakfast. Everyone else at my parents' house was gone for the day so I had some space for a little while to try and get my thoughts together. Somehow this was this was the haphazard way that I conducted my life in those days. I just worked and wandered around from friend to friend, feeling socially alive and significant when I was with them and pretty bored and down when I wasn't. The big thing was that I no longer had a big overarching structure like school or college to guide me since I had quit school. It was about the time I would have been graduating so I suppose that weighed pretty heavily upon me although I didn't think about it much.

The big challenge to me now was how to find opportunities to learn and grow without the support of school. I was deeply rebellious and felt that whatever unorthodox path I discovered would have to be suitable. I was literally hungry for adventure. I skipped meals often and didn't pay much attention to it, but it was probably a big reason behind feeling down. It had been like this ever since I had quit school and I had to confront my parents at meal times. To just say I was socially awkward was an understatement. Left to my own devices my natural lack of charisma showed through. Long awkward silences and clumsy outbursts prevailed.

Eventually by noontime I got myself together and went to work. I always hated the public promiscuity of the mall where the restaurant was where I worked. It was such a big crowd of people that frequented the place and being there during quiet hours only seemed to emphasize the impersonality of it all. Everything was subordinate to generating trade and people were so readily corralled by this. You could see it in the lustful excitement of the general manager of the restaurant who was determined to lead the restaurant in a complete cash frenzy on rainy days in Summer when thousands came to the mall from the seaside resort towns nearby. He became so excited that he took over from the cooks in the kitchen to show them how it was done. I hope I was never called upon to be so earnest and humble about greed.

That day wasn't a rainy day but it was fairly busy and I worked as a prep cook instead of a line cook where I could snack on the french fries I made. It was an efficient place really and I got along with the other cooks who had families to support and had done things like work in the Navy before coming to work at the restaurant. It was like time traveling really the way that people were so varied I suppose I had to admit I wasn't all that adept at adjusting to different people and their backgrounds. People were generally pretty relaxed but sometimes people got yelled at, which I did my best to avoid.

It was mostly other people's problems that got people into trouble I thought and when the Navy guy snapped

at me for not having the onions ready to pass through to the line I took it in stride and just figured he was having a bad day. It seems like someone was always having a bad day there and it was kind of hard to stay positive.

When evening came I was glad to hang up my apron and head out. I had an employee meal during my break so I ate pretty well that day and I felt good driving out to the lake to visit Bill's party. Bill's party was a far cry from some of the gatherings I sometimes went to in this small town where we were from. A house party was hands down better than a bunch of kids drinking in an old gravel pit somewhere. It all depended on how well your parents were doing I thought and I reassured myself that someday I would be comfortably well off although I had no ambition of having children and starting a family. It was about a 30 minute drive up to the lake where Bill's camp was, and when I got there I parked my father's truck in a gap between the hedges and got out to go in and meet everybody. I was reminded of my classmates at Whitfield who had Seaside houses in Maine and who I thought were spending their summer there comfortably dressed and at ease.

"Hello, hello," Bill came out to greet me and generously made me at home immediately. "How's it going," he asked in the gathering desk. It was just after dinner time and people were sitting outside by the lake and drinking wine. "Hey everybody, this is my friend David, he went to Whitfield but he's dropped out now and living here in Maine. He's been down to visit Barrington (that was

the college where many of them had just graduated from) and might have met some of you then." There were four people sitting in lawn chairs on the sand of the tiny beach in front of the camp and Bill introduced them one by one. "This is Jody, " he said, talking to a slight young man wearing a caftan and sitting smoking a cigarette. And this is Marie and Amy," he continued, talking to two young women who were also sitting with their feet in the water next to the lake.

I felt immediately welcome as they passed around a marijuana joint and the sun went down over the trees behind the camp. It seem like any social awkwardness there might have been between strangers was soon gone and I pulled a lawn chair down from the nearby porch to join in. I was sitting next to Amy and we sort of struck up a conversation as we sat in the dark. "So you go to Barrington," I started.

"Yes, I just graduated."

"What was your major," I continued with my questioning. She was kind of cute I thought and I wondered if she was involved with anyone. Somehow that was always my first thought when I met girls in those days.

"I did costume design. I made a lot of costumes for Bill's shows, " she said and I thought about Bill's interest in theater. It must have been a lot of work producing all the plays and one acts that they did studying theater. The conversation drifted in a sort of relaxed way into the evening and soon we were fast friends. I wasn't very

good at holding my wine although I tried and Amy didn't try very hard to conceal her interest in me. Everything was great with me who was always up for socializing and escaping my life which seemed to become so mundane now that I had left school.

However those things happened, Amy and I started a sort of temporary romance right there and then that night. We didn't have too much in common but we were both friends with Bill and we were relaxing so we ended up spending time together there at camp for the rest of the week. The week went fast with me continuing to go into work but sleeping at Bill's for a few days until I got fed up with the dreariness of work and decided to spend all my time at camp with Amy.

It was one of the first times I had given up a job without giving notice but I didn't really feel guilty because I sort of thought romance was more important than drudgery. I still had some gas in the truck so that kept me going and Amy was a couple years older than me so I sort of had faith in her. It seemed like I couldn't afford to miss out on social opportunities so I slunk around as an extra guest for a few days.

I hadn't had sex very much before so it was suddenly like I was promoted to a sort of full adulthood. I lounged around and talked a little bit about writing which I thought a lot more about because the books I read were so seldom about work. I felt like I was in an appropriate, pleasant social milieu for writing and it was kind of like being on stage for a while. I had borrowed some clothes from Bill, whose clothes I always envied and I had a

temporary girlfriend and I participated in an elegant getaway that held my social interest for a change.

One of the things I dwelt on was authenticity. To me this was what it was how young writers authentically acted and lived. It never occurred to me that writers didn't have to come from a socially leisured classes (except for practical purposes) and they weren't all expatriates or something glamorous like that. In my mixed up mind those were the things that made me want to be a writer and as I lounged around being entertained by Bill and his friends it occurred to me to wonder how writers ever got anything done.

But the authentic thing to me was having the experiences. My enthusiasm for the writing life grew immensely. The party at Bill's was the first time I really felt involved as a would be writer after my times at Winfield. I placed a lot of faith in Whitfield to make me a writer but here in Maine with other young people I had a sense of independently trying to make my way. The whole week I didn't put pencil to paper once but I felt like I was sort of on a social stage for once and I thoroughly threw myself into the part. There was a sort of diminishing class distance that I enthusiastically experienced. To me it was like people who weren't working at drudgery were in a different class; I felt I was escaping my circumstances.

Towards the end of my stay I felt the differences the most. One big obstacle to not working and staying away from my parents house was eating and I was generously welcomed at Bill's table at his party. Late in the week at

the at the lake I decided I would try to contribute and buy some groceries with the money I had left over from my paycheck, so I went to the store in my pickup and picked up some things. I had no experience in shopping and cooking and the food I picked out, which was plain and inexpensive, didn't really work out the way I had hoped. People had been drinking and enjoying lobster dinners all week and the inexpensive ingredients for macaroni casserole that I picked out were pretty much unappetizing to everybody else. I was disappointed that my contribution wasn't very helpful because my standards of cooking and eating were somewhat different than everyone else but I felt like at least I tried.

The big thing as the week came to a close was that I didn't want it to end. Everyone else had Summer internships or they were going back to California or someplace, but I was left wandering around in my truck with dwindling resources. In many ways I wasn't thinking very clearly but my feelings were so strong that I kept on my unorthodox freeloadng path. Soon the day came when everyone went home. People had had a nice early Summer getaway and that was what mattered. I just took off and drove around with no place to go.

Another friend, Brett, had a room he was renting in town where he lived but he spent all his time with his girlfriend. I gave him rides out to his girlfriend's house and slept on his floor while I could. Otherwise I just wandered around from parking space to parking space, smoking cigarettes instead of eating and just sort of blending into the general day-to-day commercial traffic.

It impressed me how much commerce affected the day-to-day life of the area. It was sort of low-key, anonymous and busy around and I felt alienated but not left out enough to try and get my job back. The cooped up, windowless kitchen I had left just didn't fit into my identity the way being a sort of renegade free spirit flirting with trouble seem to. Eventually because I knew Bill and Amy would be there doing Summer theater internships I decided to set out and leave town for Vermont. I would drive by Whitfield and see if Ms. Phillips was around and then just keep going west. I wanted anything other than my life in small town Maine.

I had a few things in my truck, a backpack with a few clothes, a poetry anthology, a notebook, and a raincoat. It seemed like enough to camp with so I sort of planned on doing that. It felt like doing wildly adventurous things was the only way to go. I had often thought how much I wanted to travel in Europe but New England and the United States would have to do. Looking back it was like my wanderlust was suitable for someone with a lot more support although I had an excess of nerve. But only a shy unassuming 18-year-old could have gotten away with it.

So I just took off driving one morning before dawn with only some gas and the money I had left in my pocket. It was 1987 and I had \$25.62 in my pocket.

The miles drifted by over familiar roads at first going south to New Hampshire and Whitfield then I got to

Whitfield and stopped to sit on the same old bench near Whitfield church that I had sat on when I met Ms. Phillips. This time I didn't linger long because I was in a hurry to cover miles on the road and head West. I was in a funk really, not thinking clearly about my plans but just blindly ready for anything that would be a change.

Since dropping out of school I had a way of being stubbornly determined and persistent which stuck with me well into adulthood.

11.

That's Not Conservative!

### Journal

As I drove West towards Vermont panic began to set in. It was a strange reflection of my peculiar personality that I didn't turn around when I reached the point where there was not enough gas or money to go back home. Something in me just said. "I don't care, I'm pushing on," and I kept driving. In My panic I tried to think of ways to come up with gas money. It occurred to me that I might sell something to get money but I didn't know what I had to sell, so I stopped at a gas station to look in a phone book to find pawn shops.

I found one but I had never been to a pawn shop before. I racked my brain trying to think as I drove on. It didn't seem to help, finding a pawn shop, and I didn't know my way around the area, so I decided I wouldn't go there.

It was just a passing idea in my panic-stricken push. I felt strangely like I had when I quit school at Whitfield. I had just sort of snapped and once I got the idea in my head there was no going back. I sat through meetings with the principal, meetings with counselors, meetings with parents and the principal, and each time I just froze my face and waited until it was over, unwilling to change my mind.

Somehow I couldn't tear myself away from the idea that I was starting bigger things and I had to be bold or I would wallow in ignominy for my whole life. Dramatic steps were necessary it seemed to keep living on a stage which I couldn't really afford to be on. What would my Idols like Hemingway or Fitzgerald do? I knew the answer. They would get out and have adventures. I remember the highway was freshly paved as I continued onward with the gas gauge on empty. It seemed like no one at all had passed before I found myself coasting down a long hill near the Vermont border. I pulled over and came to a stop where I took a long breath and gathered my things together. I smoked a cigarette and thought a long time about what I was doing. It seemed like I could do anything no matter how foolish or irresponsible, as long as I still had cigarettes. Looking back later I even thought that if there were anything I would change about those days it would be the smoking. The long sighs and reveries of smoking made it possible to do incredibly outlandish things. I had a red backpack with some clothes in it, a blanket and raincoat and a pair of sneakers and a pair of boots, so I bundled everything up and slung it on my back.

My clothes were sort of preppy so I didn't look like I was chronically on the road when I left behind my father's blue pickup truck. I just took a deep breath and did it. The wayside was dirty and narrow and I started walking so I could make progress while I waited for a ride. Cars went by, ignoring me completely, and I began to feel the sort of desperation of my situation. I had never hitched a ride before since I always had my parents' car to drive and I wondered if anyone would ever stop. I was up in the rolling hills of New Hampshire and there was forest all around.

Hitchhiking I realized was a slow dull process that involved being stranded much more than it involved riding. I had taken a map from the truck but I didn't need it. I knew the way to Barrington from my trips before and I hoped Amy would be happy to see me. There wasn't really much traffic until later in the afternoon. Then the cars with the New Hampshire license plates began to pick up and I kept well to the side of the road to avoid being run over. Roads in the countryside, it seemed, weren't really made for pedestrians and I felt like an intruder in the well-defined space of the road. Every once in awhile there would be the carcass of an animal hit by a car and I would step over the abandoned mess thinking that cars didn't really fit into nature that well.

It was a sort of a strange space I was in out in the open but not really in the wild just in the sort of limited space around communities where people were wary and suspicious of strangers. I hoped I just looked like a nice

kid looking for a ride. I had a watch, just an inexpensive digital one that I kept in my pocket, and I told time mostly by the sun. It must have been an hour or two before someone pulled over up ahead and I quickened my pace to catch up and get in. The car was a new looking luxury-economy car which was a little smaller than most but it was a nice car. I was just glad to get a ride and I said "Hi" warmly as I got in, glad to get out of the sun. The driver was a woman wearing sunglasses and looking like she just was running out running errands for a short drive. I would have been glad if it was anybody as long as they pulled over, and I put my pack in front of me in my lap as I squeezed into the passenger seat.

"Where are you going," the woman asked pleasantly.

"I'm trying to get to Vermont" I said not knowing how far I would get.

"Okay that would be great." I had a pretty good idea of where I was where I was from the map and the road signs. Keene, New Hampshire was behind me now and I worried about finding my way in the smaller towns between here and the mountains before Barrington.

"Did you go to Whitfield," the woman asked glancing at the patch on my shirt that I realized I was wearing.

"Yes, for a while. I'm from Maine," I said glad someone recognized Whitfield.

"You must be a good student. I'm a teacher. Have you been traveling long?"

"No this is my first ride, it's kind of a spur of the moment kind of thing. I don't know if I'll make it to Barrington tonight. If I remember correctly the road is pretty deserted up in the mountains. I've been through here before."

"Do you have friends here?"

"Yes, I have friends who go to Barrington College. I was just sort of at a party at somebody's camp up in Maine. People were just graduating."

"Oh that's right. School is getting out everywhere. My students are college prep students. Some of them have a lot of trouble transitioning to college. Sometimes students don't have a lot of money or their parents didn't go to college. What do you like to study?"

"Oh I studied Greek and Latin."

"Oh wow I guess you can do that if you go to Whitfield. Do you want to be a doctor?"

"No I want to be a writer. I never really liked biology."

"Do you write much? Writers are hermits. Some people don't like to spend that much time alone."

"Well I have a notebook but I haven't written in it much lately. It's tough to get things going. I often feel like I need something to write about."

"So you're out adventuring eh? Writers often lead eventful lives. I'm a history teacher and I teach my students that it's active people who make history."

"Yeah I can relate to that. I always try to get out on my own and make things happen. Going to Whitfield was like that. My parents didn't go to college or prep school or anything like that. To be honest I don't really want to go to college. I got enough of that at Whitfield. In college I bet there are a lot of rich kids. Things seem entirely different when all of your bills are paid and you can have nice clothes.

"I'll bet there are a lot of rich kids at Whitfield. They really have a reputation for that."

"Yeah it makes me kind of discouraged. But I'll keep trying."

"Well I have to turn the turn off just ahead, is this a good place to get out?"

"Yes this will be fine. Thanks for the ride." I gathered my belongings and opened the door to get out. It was sort of a wide spot in the road so I had room to step out and then she was driving off and I was stranded again. It was 5 or 10 miles of walking the rest of the late afternoon after that. I stuck my thumb out but nobody stopped.

After a few miles I got to a town in Vermont finally. It was just a highway intersection really but there was a sign pointing the way to Barrington and a gas station. I sort of wandered over to a curb in front of the store and sat down. I was starting to get used to being a pedestrian in a world full of cars and I observed the people pulling up and going into the store for a while.

It seemed like an especially rural place, and most of the cars had either Vermont or New Hampshire license plates. People pulled up and got out and went into the store for a few moments and came out with a lottery ticket or some milk or beer and nobody paid any attention to where I was sitting at the corner of the parking lot and out of the way. I was beginning to feel a little hungry after a whole day without food but I still had cigarettes and I was kind of stirred up and excited to be out on my own with nothing but the pack on my back. There was nothing to panic about although it felt kind of strange and lonely to be on my own. I was a little wary of strangers although I didn't consider myself very shy. It just seemed like a grown person would be on their guard in a situation like this. I was well away from the gas pumps and the propane canisters outside the store so I lit up a cigarette and felt like the rugged Marlboro man, a lone renegade working class cowboy out on his own. It was getting on toward dusk when an old car pulled up outside the store and a guy not too much older than me got out and went into the store. The guy just sort of looked like he was a local, rural fellow wearing jeans and a t-shirt and a redneck hat and there was a girl sitting dwarfed in the passenger seat in the big sedan. When he came out of the store he sort of grunted in my direction, "Where are you going" and when I said Barrington he said hop in back.

I was glad of my luck and hopped in the back seat with my stuff and said thanks. As we pulled out of the gas station and started driving around I got the sense that the guy and the girl were just out joyriding because

there was nothing to do in the town. I didn't say anything because the driver and his passenger were quiet and eventually we drove by a middle-aged man who was walking along the side of the road with his thumb out. The guy pulled the car over for this guy too and said get in.

The man looked a little ragged like he caught local rides often and when the guy driving said they were heading over the mountains to Barrington he said he'd go along. Soon it was dark and the driver switched on the headlights as he followed the winding road into the mountains. He wasn't very fast or reckless at first, just casually driving into the hills and he apparently knew the way well. But as we rose into the hills the road got curvy like a formula one road course and the guy's driving started to change.

"Hang on," he said to no one in particular and speeded up dramatically around the sharp mountain curves. The tires squealed in protest as he went and I gripped anything I could hang on to in the back seat with the stranger hanging on for dear life. It was mystifying to wonder what turned the guy into such a reckless daredevil and I grimly guessed he was showing off for the girl or something. First to the left and then to their right we occupants of the backseat would be thrown back and forth by his antics. I wondered who would find us if we crashed on this deserted mountainside in the dark with no other traffic.

Now it became suddenly clear to me how soon someone from Barrington that I had heard about on my trips

there crashed and died on this road. I was visiting Bill and like up to his camp party I had met a girl and we were hanging out. She put a tape into her tape player and said it was in the deck of the car when they found it after the crash. Apparently she had been involved with the guy and was very sad about his death. I wondered about how it would look to be in in a crash with three strangers and imagine what a mess it would be to sort out. I drove recklessly in my father's truck sometimes but nothing like that. After a while the road was under repair and there were barricades and a gravel section of the road that went on for miles. "Caution Road Construction," the sign said but the driver ignored it like it wasn't even there and drove just as fast on the gravel as he had on the pavement. The car fishtailed wildly around the curves spewing a trail of rocks and gravel behind it as the driver apparently imagined he was a race car driver and barreled on.

About 10pm we made it into Barrington on the other side of the mountain. When the road began to straighten out and there were sides to catch the car along the road I breathed a sigh of relief and looked forward to getting out as soon as possible. I didn't know it but he we were in North Barrington as I got out and wandered toward another corner store in the dark. I didn't know where I was or what to do so I went back in the tall grass behind the store and spread out my raincoat on the ground. I lay down and quickly went to sleep.

I was later surprised at how tired I was but I went to sleep in the grass readily and had a vivid dream. I was back at Whitfield and it was the beginning of the school year. It was the 11th grade so I was returning to Whitfield and meeting up with my friends from the year before. Whitfield had something for everyone it seemed so I guess I was finding a sort of niche and fitting in. It was the first day of class so there was an assembly to start the day and I was on my way to the dining hall with my acquaintances Daryl Winthrop and Ira Westerberg. The dorm was just arriving back after Summer and there were people here and there with everyone sort of finding their cliques and catching up. People came from all sorts of situations and places at Whitfield and some people had driven up with their belongings and parents and others were just arriving on the airport shuttle from Boston.

I had driven down with my parents in the family car, a late model sedan with a Whitfield sticker proudly displayed in the rear window, and unloaded my belongings in the back of Macmillan Hall. I had a room on the front of the building this year so that was an improvement and Daryl's room was just down the hall from me. I had wandered into the hall as soon as my parents left to see what was up and Daryl was there unpacking. His parents had just left too and he was caught up in his task. Daryl's parents lived just 20 minutes away from the school but he was a boarding student and he brought a lot of supplies over the short distance from home to make himself comfortable. By comparison I didn't really bring nearly half as much stuff

to school with me, mostly just some clothes and toiletries, but Daryl brought a stereo, a refrigerator, some carpet and anything else he thought he might use.

I said, "Hi, how's it going," and Daryl immediately loaded a heavy metal tape into his massive tape deck and cranked up a Whitesnake album. Daryl was somewhat of a Heavy Metal fan and had an extensive collection of cassette tapes. I didn't even have a radio in my room so I just went along with Daryl's taste. "Good to see you. Is Ira back?"

"Yeah I think I saw him outside a few minutes ago."

"You want to go breakfast in the morning," I asked.

"Sure, that sounds good," Daryl replied and I left him to his music.

The next morning when I went down to his room Ira was there all decked out in a new seersucker suit and Daryl was kidding him. Ira was a sleight intellectual type who was extraordinarily quiet. He was known for spending his whole first year at Whitfield locked in his room alone and he was just standing starting to make a few friends outside of class. Daryl was sort of loud and impudent about making fun of people so this how most interactions went. Daryl put in ZZ Top's "Sharp Dressed Man" and was pointing and gesturing at Ira excitedly. Without sarcasm, Daryl didn't say nearly as much.

I was dressed in my plain blazer and shirt with a new tie and Daryl who was a notoriously plain dresser was just wearing his usual old coat and tie. Ira was getting into

the Whitfield sort of style slowly and he had gotten his new suit at Brooks Brothers. All three of us sort of rocked out to the music and then Daryl turned it off and we set out for the dining hall. It was only a short walk from the dorm and the sun was shining and everyone was filled with optimism to be starting a new year. It seemed like nothing could go wrong and we were on top of the world.

The dining hall was the same as ever with convenient shelves to leave your books on in the lobby and plenty of spaces to hang outer clothes if you wanted. We got in line and waited silently to get up to the food area which was serving bacon and eggs if you wanted it or if you wanted you could get cereal and fruit. No one thought much about the food at Whitfield but the selections are generally pretty good. I always felt modest being all dressed up while people were humbly serving your food.

Daryl was as unruly as ever about his eating habits, always taking extra, and Ira was very reserved, tending to eat yogurt and pita bread which were always available. When you thought about it you spent a lot of time at Whitfield in the dining hall and people had a lot of conversations there. On this day Daryl started in on Ira's suit again by kidding him that he was going to turn into a conservative dresser. Ira made a face and said, "No, I don't know about that," and kept on eating.

"Sure you are," Daryl continued. "You're going to wear that suit and get a conservative job on Wall Street. You will fit right in."

Ira then retorted, "You don't even know what conservative means!" Ira was known for his generally bleeding heart liberal views and Daryl was generally New Hampshire conservative most of the time. Ira was from California.

"Oh yeah of course I don't," Daryl replied sarcastically. He read a famous conservative newspaper regularly and actually prided himself on his conservatism. It was kind of a point of honor. "Conservatism means not overburdening taxpayers with outlandish bills to support half the population on social welfare programs. It means supporting a strong military and keeping burdens well controlled so we don't all end up speaking Spanish."

"Why should we close the borders," Ira asked. "Hispanics just come here and do jobs that other people don't want to do. If there were Hispanics in Whitfield, New Hampshire, they would work in the kitchen here, serving our food. I think that's pretty helpful."

"Yeah sure they would, taking jobs away from New Hampshire people," Daryl replied, "they would just come here and start collecting welfare and burdening people who work for a living." Daryl was pretty extreme in his views and not always very sensitive to others. The furthest thing from anyone's mind was that anyone present would end up collecting welfare and that was kind of the subtext for most of what people read and absorbed about politics. Everything was about the budget and some of us embraced certain views more enthusiastically than others. I myself had earnestly

wanted to be an entrepreneur in my days before I came to Whitfield and I listened to a lot of conservative radio talk shows because that was what there was to listen to in the household where I grew up because there was no TV.

I mostly tended to more progressive points of view on things like nuclear war and I did my best to come up with arguments that countered the matter-of-fact, down-to-earth, self-interest arguments of Daryl's conservatism. Whitfield was full of adolescent political views, from the views of people who absorbed their opinions from their parents who ran African Aid organizations to the reactionary views of some of those whose parents ran large corporate brewing and oil interests. Whitfield was over-represented, if anything, at the upper end of the corporate side. Apparently the ostentation of the place was appealing.

I tried to stay out of Daryl and Ira's conversation as best I could because I sometimes hesitated to venture into flights of exegetical eloquence but their conversation was pretty typical. Having political views was usually mistaken for emotional maturity and a lot of people liked to try out their debating skills outside of class. It was like everybody's ambitions made their heads swell and if you could find a place more enthusiastic about politics you would be hard-pressed.

Soon it was time to finish up and send our trays into the cleanup area while we straightened our clothes and set out for the Academy building where assembly was held. People were straggling across campus dressed in dress

code for assembly and like for everything else during the school year you got the sense that it was an occasion from the way people were dressed. They walked in small groups from all directions and people greeted their old friends and acquaintances enthusiastically. It all seemed out of another place in time to me really and entering the academy building and heading upstairs did little to mitigate the impression.

The Academy building was this brick neo-colonial style building with a cupola with a bell and marble floors and fixtures inside. The marble stairs to the second floor were worn away from the steps of generations of students, something the architect must have anticipated would make a considerable impression on them. Once upstairs the entire middle of the building was taken up by a large hall with balconies and high ceilings that was used for assembly. At the front of the hall was a stage where the podium and a great carved seal of the school was on display like a courthouse.

Around the walls were oil paintings, ostentatiously displayed, of former Academy principles and teachers staring down from their spotlighted places either as examples of a respectability to strive for or as staring overseers of the student body. Who penned the Latin inscription carved in the stone outside the front doors always remained a mute mystery.

Today Darryl and Ira and I split off to find our assembly seats and check in and I found I was sitting in the front rows of the main floor and I took my seat already

starting to sweat a little in the September heat. People slowly came in and by 8:45 the place was completely full with returning seniors looking bored and calm and new 9th graders looking terrified with anticipation. In between the 10th and 11th graders reveled in the self-importance they were already learning to take for granted.

Assembly began right away with the principal taking the podium and pausing a few minutes as everyone quieted down to hear him speak.

"Welcome back everyone," he began, "it's time to begin another Whitfield School year and I see you are all glad to be here and ready for the school year. I see a lot of familiar faces as well as a lot of new ones. For those of you who are returning I hope you are able to pick up where you left off and for those of you who are new I hope Whitfield turns out to be everything you may have expected it to be. As we begin this new school year please be courteous to each other on the walkways and paths. Whitfielders customarily greet each other on the sidewalk and I hope you all take a moment to maintain this tradition. You are all the future of Whitfield and I'm sure you are aware of our storied past. I hope you all have a feeling of belonging here because no matter if things are not going well or you're feeling down you truly belong here and that is important for everyone to remember. Whitfield is an excellent place to start building an extraordinary future and I know many of you will embrace paths here that you pursue for the rest of your lives. Remember always that you must do your

best to live up to the traditions that are being given to you here and that you are among the most qualified young people in the country. You are a select few and that is no secret. It is a great privilege to belong to your Whitfield class and one you will long remember. Always strive to be the best for your part and your efforts will serve you well. Always keep in mind the legacy of John Whitfield, the founder of our school, and remember his efforts to grow Whitfield from the tiny Whitfield school house to the sprawling facility it is today. He founded Whitfield 200 years ago with a few books and some ink and paper and it has grown into the world famous institution it is today. Truth, honor and integrity were his catch words and they had hold as strong today as they did when he was alive. Whitfield students are among the finest anywhere and you must always count yourself as carrying through the special task of building the Whitfield tradition. Thank you for your attention as we start off the new year and I hope to meet many of you soon around campus and please know that my office is always open to anyone who wants to come in. Thank you and may very good fortune be with you."

With that the principal dismissed them as quickly as they had come in and there was the sudden hub-bub from the benches as people got up and made their way to the doors.

12.

They're Lucky They Don't Get Busted

### Journal

I woke up lying on the ground in the tall grass behind the small store. There was dew on the grass and it was about 6AM around sunrise. It was quiet and calm and I was glad no one had noticed me sleeping. I was new at camping and this was really no place to camp, just a secluded spot where I could put down my raincoat and blanket. I tried to rub the sleep from my eyes and brush off the blades of grass on my clothes. My gear made quite an awkward package. First was my red backpack, then there was my blanket roll connected by straps to my pack and the raincoat and a big pair of boots connected to it all. It was a little heavy but not too bad. My hunger was less now that I had slept and I was able to ignore it as I slung my completed pack over my shoulder and walked back out to the road.

It was a quiet back road in Vermont from what I could see and there were a couple of houses next door. I tried to think how to find Amy, and my best idea was to set out for campus and ask around there. Also I

remembered the campus was sort of closed to the public with a gatehouse at the main entrance and a security guard. I remembered from my times visiting campus before that you had to tell the guard whom you were visiting and they were called to confirm that you were welcome. It occurred to me that they might know where to call so I set out for campus.

The back way to campus, approaching from the side I was on, was a mile-long back driveway that went straight through the trees to the campus and avoided the front gate. I walked along because I was getting used to walking everywhere right now and I enjoyed the idyllic scenery through the sparse woods. It was sort of a strange space to be in again, surrounded by nature that I didn't know how to live off and existing in close proximity to other people who had so many comforts and conveniences. Still, as I walked in the early morning stillness I felt glad and free and full of anticipation of seeing Amy again.

Birds chirped and squirrels frolicked as I walked along feeling alone. It wasn't long before I came to a few buildings that were part of the campus. One building looked like it was an art studio and there were a number of hulking, abandoned objects outside. I guessed that they were less successful sculptures that were left behind by students. Everything looked so serene and

innocent in the morning air and I remembered back a little to school where I had taken an art course.

Somehow taking an art course in school hadn't seemed very innocent to me at the time and I remembered hesitating as I tried to sketch and model clay from real life models. I kept walking and soon I was walking in a large field across which sat a large stone house on a hill. I was sure the house was part of campus so I was glad to reach my destination.

From the house onward there were walkways and passages between a warren of different buildings. It was getting to be 7 or 8AM now and everything seemed deserted. I wondered if there were any Summer programs going on and if there would be people around later.

On the other side of the buildings on the top of the hill there was the guard station I remembered. There was a security guard on duty who didn't seem too worried about my presence and I said hello as I

approached where he was sitting just inside the doorway of the small building.

"Hi," he said back looking like a tall slim man in his thirties who probably lived in the rural area nearby, "can I help you?"

"I'm trying to visit Amy Carmel," I said. "She's working at a Summer position in the theater department."

"Oh ok, let me try to reach the theater department." Apparently knew he knew the number and he dialed it

and then waited for someone to answer. "Hi this is the guard station," he said after a moment, "there's someone here for Amy." "What's your name," he said to me, covering the receiver with his hand, "do you have an ID," he asked.

I quickly got out my wallet and handed him my ID. It was my driver's license which I had had for a few years now.

"Okay I'll send him over," he said and hung up. After he hung up the phone the guard handed my ID back and said, "She's over in the theater department. If you take this path here back in the direction you came from it's just past these buildings. There's a big building standing by itself before you get to the big house on the hill."

I took my ID and said thanks and headed off in the direction he indicated thinking that finding Amy had been as easy as I hoped. I walked through the buildings with a higher step and thought for a minute what would Amy think of me now in my hitchhiking gear. We were fast friends but we really didn't even know each other that well and I hoped that she would be glad to see me again. I hadn't seen her for a week or two and the last time we had been together I didn't have any plans to travel.

Soon I was at the theater and I went inside the front door looking for signs to go to a box office or front desk or something. There weren't any signs really so I just sort of followed the hallways around the building looking around. Luckily Amy was looking for me too and

when I spotted her down the hall we came toward each other slowly and hugged.

"Hi sunshine! What are you doing here," Amy exclaimed.

"Well it's a long story but I've set out hitchhiking across the country," I said to try to sell my half-formed plans as well as I could.

"You're hitchhiking! Well I guess that's adventurous. Are you going to stay long?"

"Well I thought I'd try and visit a few days if that's okay with you."

"What are you doing today? I'm here at work until 3."

"Oh okay, I don't want to get in the way. I can just explore town on my own for the day and meet up with you later. Sorry about the surprise. I'm just being free-spirited and making my way as I can."

"Okay I've got to get back to work. Why don't I meet you here at 3," Amy said.

I said great and we kissed goodbye and were hooked up again just like that I thought to myself as I made my way back outside the building where I paused a minute to orient myself to my new situation. Wow this was great I thought Amy is glad to see me and I can stay with her tonight. It was a relief to have a connection to someone again and as I walked back along the path to the woods I felt like I had everything a young person really wanted in life. I had freedom and a romantic partner, that was

enough I thought, although it would be good to have some food too I realized.

I walked a while back along the path I had come and thought about how I would pass the time until 3. North Barrington was just a small place with no town square or anything I realized so it occurred to me that hanging around there wouldn't be very practical. There were some fields along the back drive that I had followed to come onto campus and I thought perhaps I could rest there and pass the time. As the time passed the day got warmer so rest was good I thought.

At the first pleasant field I came to I wandered off the road and looked for a shady spot to sit. I didn't have to look far and soon I had tossed my pack aside and was lying on a mossy spot under a tree and thinking about my dream the night before which I remembered vividly. Going away to school was the only unusual thing I had done in life so far so my thoughts kept coming back to it. I didn't know why I had dreamed about the beginning of the 11th grade but I had especially vivid memories of that year. I spent the whole year at Whitfield and it was eventful.

Lying on the ground and looking up at an old oak tree I thought about the year that had passed and the people I met and hung out with. More than anyone else I remember Tim Robbins and the first time I hung out with him. Tim was this African American guy from New York City who was going to Whitfield on scholarship like me. He was a medium height thin guy who played football and had been at Whitfield for all four years. You

could usually tell if people were scholarship students by their clothes but Tim stuck out even more because he had a thick urban accent that he spoke through and although he was usually reserved and decorous he was kind of hyperactive in private when he relaxed.

Tim was in his senior year and it was difficult to know what he was like in the years before Whitfield when he was younger. Whitfield was like that because it focused on such formative years and many people started Whitfield when they were still basically children and weren't even fully grown. Whitfield seemed really private like that and everybody had entirely separate, distant lives back home that nobody knew anything about.

I had known Tim from around the dorm some but not really because he was a senior and hung out mostly with other seniors. One weekend in the Fall of that year I was introduced to him a little unexpectedly. I had been hanging around the dorm in my usual way, sticking especially close because my spending money had run out for the year. It was October and the money I had earned over the Summer was all gone. This was how things usually went. At about that time of the year I started to depend on a few dollars I got from my work study job in the library. I was free to come and go to do it because it was kind of independent. I

pasted it together old books in the library and pasted up some of the library stamps and things that they needed before they could circulate. I was really too active to sit still outside of class for very long so I often skipped the

sessions but it was supposed to provide a little extra pocket money while I was at school, something I sorely needed to fit in.

When I ran out of pocket money it was awkward going along to the store or restaurant with my friends and I often found myself being generously treated by other students who had more to spare than I. The dorm was kind of quiet a lot of the time. The people who studied a lot were often at the library and sometimes it seemed like there was nobody there but this was a little deceptive because a lot went on in secret too. There were people, upperclassmen especially, who hung out on their own and kept quite a bit of distance between themselves and the rest of the school. One Saturday afternoon I found myself talking to Beekman who was this quiet senior who kind of kept to himself. He was this sort of guy who seemed to like the outdoors and I found myself talking to him when I would be out walking in the halls of MacMillan and his door was open. Whitfield was generally pretty egalitarian in that way. Beekman was talking about going hiking in the forest near school and I was listening to try and get a sense of where he was talking about because I thought it might be a good area to visit sometime when I was looking for something to do.

"It's down by the boathouse at the end of the parkway," he said, "people go drinking down there sometimes. There's never really faculty or anything like that down there. It's just the large area of woods with the old roads and paths in it. Do you want to come along?"

I wasn't doing anything in particular so I said, "Yeah sure, will we be back before dinner?" I asked if we needed to take anything.

"No," it's just a walk in the woods and we'll be back in a couple of hours, and with that he got up from his bed where he was sitting and grabbed a Swiss army knife from a shelf nearby. "Let's go," he concluded.

Beekman was a medium tall guy with red hair and glasses and he was wearing an old t-shirt and tennis shoes as we set out past the dining hall and across campus and down to the parkway by the river. It was a long walk but we were pretty fit I guess and it didn't take long before we reached the pair of stone pillars on either side of the gateway to the nature preserve.

I didn't really see why there needed to be a gateway to the forest but like everything at Whitfield somebody must have bequeathed a generous gift specifically to be used for some extravagant and extra nice project like building a nature preserve. They were a few mentions of the area in the Whitfield Book which was sort of like a handbook of campus with names and addresses and the school rules but the area was generally pretty secluded and Beekman was the first to introduce me to it.

The area leading up to the woods was an old field which was quickly going back to a wooded area and soon we felt a thousand miles away from campus with the gates behind us and surrounded by medium high pine trees that were growing in the field. I felt relatively at home

because I had grown up in the woods at home but I wasn't an especially good woodsman. I was a Cub Scout but I didn't stay in scouting as I got older so the only activities I remembered were pizza parties and making crafts at our Den Mother's home. We didn't learn a lot of nature skills.

Beekman led the way across the field and down a path through stone walls that bordered a more overgrown forested area and once in the thicker woods the park opened up into an old road. Beekman seem to know his way around pretty well so I just followed in silence and we headed deep into the woods. Nature was all around us with hilly rocky terrain and woods and huge antediluvian boulders as big as a small house. I picked up a decent size stick to use as a walking stick and found myself wishing I knew more about the green plants that lined the pathway here and there.

Everything seemed like a great blank slate that you were supposed to be able to live off but I was generally still bewildered by it all even after my years of experience as a child. If Beekman was at all intimidated by it he didn't show it, intrepidly leading the way as the path became more and more obscure. Deep into the woods after the road became a path again Beekman started off following this old stone wall and eventually we came to the edge of a small clearing. "Look," Beekman said and pointed in the direction we were traveling. In the distance you could make out a sort of concrete dome and towers and Beekman said it was the nuclear power plant. He sat down on the old stonewall bordering the

clearing. "Wow," I said, "I didn't know the power plant was so close." To myself I wondered if there was radiation to avoid but I thought probably not because the dome was just a speck in the distance. I sat down on the rock wall as well. "Have you been here before," I asked.

"You bet, I come out here on weekends. It's good to get away from school."

"Yeah I know what you mean, school is so... I don't know, uptight."

Beekman didn't say anything to this but seemed to agree as he got out of his pocket knife and began carving a walking stick for himself.

"Did you go to public school before you came to Whitfield," I asked, feeling curious.

"Yeah I came here in the 10th grade like you. Whitfield was my father's idea. He's a history professor. Some people get all uptight about education. I could live without the pressure. People deal with it differently. A lot of people do drugs now. Don't know if it's the pressure or they're just irresponsible. It's something to do I guess.

"They're lucky they don't get busted by the Cormiers." The Cormiers were the French couple who lived in an apartment in MacMillan Hall and oversaw the dorm. They were nice but I wouldn't want them to catch me breaking the rules.

"Yeah it's hard to imagine Marner and Deerfield getting careless but you never know, it could happen."

With that Beekman got up to try out his walking stick and put away his pocket knife. We were quiet most of the way back and Beekman took a few detours to show me the other paths in the woods. There were large areas to cover and we stepped up our pace. Even though it was Saturday afternoon there didn't seem to be anyone else out hiking or at least we didn't meet up with anyone. It was amazing how distant from school it felt. I was disappointed to find myself back in civilization when we reached the gate down by the river parkway.

Soon we were passing other students on their way back from town and the transition was complete. People were dressed for Saturday and they wore shorts and jeans and generally looked different from when they were dressed for class. I wished I could be aloof and independent from all these little distinctions but there were so many details and I felt drawn to constantly noticing the difference between the pretensions of boarding school and life back at home. We abandoned our walking sticks next to a trash can soon after we got back on campus and they looked out of place leaning against the trash bin as we left them behind.

MacMillan was mysteriously still and quiet although I knew there must be people there hiding away from the public atmosphere of school, locked away in private rooms which had a remoteness not unlike our trip out into the nature preserve. Even at meal times people stayed in their rooms at Whitfield because for those

who wish to lay low that was always an option. For the time being though Beekman and I ignored this and decided to go to dinner after quick trips to our respective rooms.

Beekman wasn't much of a talker really and neither was I so at the dining hall we ignored the group of lowerclassmen seated together at a table and ate separately in a different part of the hall. I hadn't spent that much time with seniors before so I was a little intimidated. I felt stern and important and kept a little more distance from the lowerclassmen. Because of dorm living people of different ages interacted a lot but there was still the basic difference of age and class level. You got a good sense of how people's personalities had a lot to do with how they got along. You had to be pretty shy to keep to yourself completely. Dinner was okay, hamburgers I think, and the dining hall was fairly empty the way it often was on weekends. People went into the town and ate at restaurants or didn't eat at all at meal times and waited to order pizza later. Beekman and I were sort of readjusting to being on campus.

After dinner I split off from Beekman and he headed back up to his room while I went to sit in the common room where there were some chairs and the TV. I didn't watch TV, that seemed boring, and instead I just sat by myself looking out the window for a while. It was getting dark at around 6PM now and I sat for a long time. Whitfield could be notably boring on Saturday nights. I sat and thought about being in the woods that day and how escaping from Whitfield was both welcome and

strange. When I was at school everything took over and there wasn't much of a sense of balance in life. You played sports and went to class and socialized over homework, constantly keeping busy. In down times like weekends you were restless for things to engage with. It was a lifestyle thing that I didn't embrace as much as I did when I had been at home with my parents. At home I always wanted to get out of the house and be around people but at Whitfield with others always not far away it was different.

As I sat there I was restless and felt like a rogue after my trip out to the woods. There was something about the squareness and uptightness of Whitfield that brought out an impulse to break rules and assert my individuality. I decided to go upstairs and look for Daryl or Ira. Daryl usually went to the grocery store on Saturdays and maybe Ira wasn't busy studying. I set off on my way into the first floor hallway by the door, but out in the hallway I unexpectedly ran into Marner who was quietly knocking on the door to the downstairs rooms. There were two rooms down on the first floor with a single door that opened out into the hallway. They were the most private rooms in the building because they were separated from their outside door by a vestibule and the inner room was quite distant from the outside door. Marner was softly knocking on the door- a secret knock I expected - to be let in, and when he looked over at me in the gray light in the open hallway his eyes look bloodshot.

"Come on in Carmichael," he leered at me and since I wasn't doing anything else and Daryl and Ira were probably busy I obeyed. "Have you been in before, we're having a party," he continued as he closed the door behind us and I realized all the doors were closed leading into the inner room and I could hear music that I couldn't hear before outside.

Once inside the two further closed doors I felt like I was in another secret world altogether. Inside the inner room where the shades were drawn and there was a dim orange light bulb in the corner I realized there were a half dozen people and the music was playing moderately loud. I recognized Krishna Deerfield and Deeks and over in the corner was Tim Robbins, all upperclassmen that I didn't know very well.

"Carmichael, man how are you doing," someone asked and I replied, "okay thanks," feeling a little intimidated and out of place. I had never seen upperclassmen so at ease with lights dimmed and music playing and I wondered what could be the catalyst for so much camaraderie. The room was cleverly arranged for comfortable lounging and I found a seat back near the door.

"Want a bong hit," someone asked but I shook my head no. I had smoked marijuana before over the Summer back home but I was reluctant to start smoking here at school. My reluctance didn't slow the others down at all and they watched reverently as Deeks did the hit. Deeks was this post-graduate football player who had finished regular high school but was doing an extra year at

Whitfield before college. In this way Whitfield teams got college level players and the players got into better colleges because they had more preparation. The post-graduate players were often giants and Deeks was no exception. I had never seen anyone do a bong hit before and I was curious to watch with the others. The bong was a long tube with an amount of water in it at the bottom. When the smoker sucked the air through the tube the smoke from a lit pipeful of marijuana bubbled through the water where it cooled and lay in the tube until all the marijuana was smoked. After the marijuana was burned the smoker inhaled all the cooled smoke into his lungs then exhaled into a rolled up towel to keep the smoke from filling up the room and making a smell.

These guys were all expert at this and one by one they passed the bong around taking hits. They were all obviously pretty high, giggling and laughing uproariously as they chastised each other for releasing smoke or coughing. No one slapped down the gigantic Deeks though and except for his presiding over everything like a de facto enforcer the other boys were remarkably boisterous.

I was soberly reminded of my trip to the woods earlier in the day where civilization ended and a sort of paradisaical state took over. There, you would never have realized that structure and decorum prevailed at Whitfield and these hooligans were for the most part regular citizens on campus most of the time. It seemed like they were hardly about learning social skills and

having experiences that would serve them later but like Beekman in the woods they were finding release from the premature pressures of their lives.

After a while people calmed down and the music seemed to take over. I watched as Tim Robbins distracted himself studiously with the album cover to the Jimi Hendrix album that was playing.

13.

### A Double Standard

#### Journal

3PM couldn't come soon enough. I spent the day hungry in the shade thinking of Whitfield. I had a book of poetry in my pack that I read some, passing a little time. During the day cars came up the drive occasionally coming on to campus. I sort of made a little camp with my gear strewn around to one side and little piles of acorns in neat little formations in the open space on the moss.

Somehow more than at Whitfield I learned to concentrate more passing the time there. It brought my thoughts around to focus, drifting aimlessly back to the focus of my thoughts with new insights and memories coming with them. I slowly pieced together figment by figment all the memories I could have managed from the 11th grade at Whitfield. When it was about 3:00 I

gathered by things together and started walking back up to campus. At 3PM it was still pretty warm so I walked slowly and noticed the old stone wall that followed the road and peered back into the trees looking for signs of what the landscape might have looked like in the past. It was a safe bet almost anywhere in New England that everything had once been fields or forest.

I passed by the big old house and thought about how colleges and universities were synonymous with the accumulation of property. It seemed to me that austerity was so much more associated with culture that more austere institutions would contribute to the living skills of students who were trying to begin cultural careers, unless such careers were to be limited to the fanatic or rich. Instead colleges pandered to the financial ambitions of students and parents, and faculty were among the most mercenary products of the system as well as the most accomplished.

Soon I was among the theater buildings and searching around for the door I had used before I when I met Amy. But Amy was there just inside the doors waiting for me and she stood back while I pushed through the door and we hugged.

"How was Barrington," she asked and I realized I might have to fill her in on everything that had happened since we parted up in Maine.

"Oh it was nice. I spent the day in the woods back along the drive under an oak tree. I did a lot of daydreaming. What are you doing here at the theater?"

"I'm organizing the costume wardrobe. It's all over the place after the theater season last year."

"Well that sounds useful. Do you need any help," I asked.

"That's okay I'm doing repairs and sending things for cleaning. It's really a one person job. Let's head back up to North Barrington."

We started walking back up the paths until we passed the big house and headed down the drive. It was nice to have some company for a change. I had been on my own for two days and I still wasn't used to the solitude. I thought about telling Amy about my thoughts on austerity and universities but I didn't know how to explain myself. It was always an awkward thing to talk about resources openly with other people. For reasons that weren't hard to understand people always became guarded when you suggested possible changes that might affect their privacy.

"There's the spot I spent the day." I pointed out the tree by the road and went on, "It's sort of like living like an Indian, living out in the open with no boundaries. Nothing infringes on your freedom but necessity." "Speaking of which, do you have everything you need," Amy asked.

"Well I'm out of money. I'm thinking of heading up to Middlebury in a couple of days and getting a job or something like that for a couple of weeks. That should get me started."

"Oh have you eaten," she asked and I could hardly contain myself I was so eager to share my problem.

"Well no, come to think of it I'm kind of hungry."

"Let me loan you some money so you can go to the store."

"Oh that would be great. I really appreciate it. The best thing would be for me to get some cheap food and stock up for a few days. I have never tried to fast for days before. It's a new thing."

After Amy realized I was hungry we picked up the pace a bit to get back to her room in North Barrington. When we got there she explained it was just a rooming house with a kitchen I could use if I wanted and she showed me a spot where I could store my gear. In a way I suppose I was very eager because it was the first time since Maine that I had seen Amy but I was too hungry to want to have sex. Amy handed me \$10 when I stored my gear and she explained that it was a few miles walk on the road around town to get to the grocery store. She was tired after working all day and I said I would go alone.

Barrington College was on a large hill, sort of a small mountain really in the Green Mountains of Vermont. The road to the grocery store was a narrow sort of

country highway that went all the way around from the North Barrington side of the hill to the town side in the forested countryside around Barrington. I'd say it was about 3 miles. I took my empty pack along to carry the food back and set out.

It was getting later when I set out up but my heart was light at the prospect of finally getting some food. There was little traffic to speak of along the road. My long legs carried me along at a good pace and I smoked the last of the cigarettes that I had been rationing since I set out the day before last. There were few signs of civilization along the road and no houses on the steep hillside that it followed. I stuck my thumb out when the occasional car drove by but no one picked me up. It was a long walk.

I could hardly contain my anticipation of food on the way and when I finally made it around to the supermarket it was getting towards sunset. I went in thinking of what I was going to buy. I wanted to stretch the money Amy loaned me as much as possible so I tried to think while the aisles of delicious food called out to me from every direction in the store. The same sort of cooking and shopping skills that were limited back at Bill's camp at home probably helped me here as I found myself only thinking of buying economical food and ignoring all the other numerous choices at the store. I got kits to make macaroni and cheese and peanut butter and jelly and bread and this was about all I could buy, but I expected it would be enough to eat for a few days.

When I checked out at the counter no one noticed anything unusual although I wondered if I would blend in. I suspected that I looked like a regular college student and went unnoticed. I also spent some of the money on more cigarettes. I packed the grocery bag into my pack and with a full load I set out walking back to the in the dark. It was a crystal clear May night and I was amazed at how many stars you could see out in the countryside. I kept walking without interruption until I got back to Amy in North Barrington.

At Amy's rooming house I greeted Amy and immediately set to work cooking up some food to eat. It seemed like forever for the water to boil and the macaroni to cook and I fidgeted impatiently in the tiny kitchen that I was using. I had gotten milk and macaroni and margarine at the store to make the macaroni and cheese with and I got them out to be ready. I was glad there were cooking dishes in the kitchen and a colander to drain the macaroni. Amy wasn't hungry she said.

At last I had a bowl full of food and I began to eat hungrily. I shoveled the box of macaroni in and couldn't eat fast enough to keep up with my appetite. I had never wanted food this much before and I realized I was much more interested in food than sex. This was a new thing and I was amazed by it. It didn't take me long before I ate all the macaroni and cheese and had a full stomach. I could feel the sugar from the carbohydrates coursing through me immediately.

Food was a drug like nicotine I barely realized in my hurry. Its effects had to be treated with relative care.

After I ate I thanked Amy again for lending me the money and we sat on her bed and watched a little television that she had. It seemed to me like Amy had a lot of creature comforts as we sat there, but really she was living a very spartan life. As far as I was concerned now that I had food I had everything I wanted. Eventually we drifted off to sleep and I slept like a king in Amy's tiny single bed in her little room in Vermont.

In my sleep I dreamed again. After a while I was back at Whitfield and more of the 11th grade year had passed. I was back hanging out in Daryl's room and listening to Daryl complain about his math teacher. He disliked her brusque talk and felt that she was grading his exams too harshly. "She did it again," he exclaimed, tossing his books on the bed. "This time I studied for weeks for this test!"

Math was a point of honor with most Whitfielders and Daryl couldn't accept less than exemplary scores. I was the exception to this sort of culture of numbers since I had not done well on the placement exam they sent to take at home and I started out a year behind with my math sequence. I just plugged away at my below grade level courses and didn't complain because I got to take advanced language courses. I don't know what it was but people seemed to equate math performance with general intelligence and valued math scores as much as money in the bank, which had equal cult status.

I tried to console Daryl, who had both money in the bank and pretty good math scores, "I'm sure she knows her stuff. "

"But she keeps reaming me on showing my work and little details. She's a complete tool."

At this point Ira came in looking disgusted, interrupting Daryl's pity party. "You gotta hear this, guys. You won't believe what the Student Judiciary Committee did with Warmer last night."

Daryl and I stopped talking at the mention of Augustus Warmer, heir to one of the biggest oil fortunes in the world and well-known VIP braggart on campus. Warmer was probably the biggest celebrity in the 11th grade and almost everyone was jealous of his wealth. People would watch in rapt attention when he pulled up his stretch limousine after occasional trips off campus and his imposing figure was well known for playing bass in a band at dances. Daryl and I waited for Ira to continue. Ira was generally pretty levelheaded and if he was offended you knew that the cause was pretty bad.

"They let off Warmer again with just a slap on the wrist. Anybody else would have been dismissed two semesters ago. I don't get what they could be thinking on the Student Judiciary Committee, if they think he deserves special privileges because he is so wealthy or they don't wait to want to offend him because of their future legal careers or what. He's not all that popular. The Student Judiciary ought to be kicked out of school!"

"What did Warmer do," I asked.

"Well it was like the last two times he has gone up for action. He was caught in this freshman girl's room in a girls' dormitory where he wasn't supposed to be. They

kicked the girl out but they only censured Warmer. I can't believe they would do this, they are definitely using a double standard. He hits on girls all the time. He's out of control. Just because you have a lot of money doesn't mean you can be a pig. That's what the Student Judiciary seems to want to preserve. The right to be a pig if you're rich. It's not up to them to ensure that he gives a lot of money to the Whitfield endowment someday."

"Last of the Tarquins," I put in.

"They are letting him treat this place like it's his private playground I swear. Wealth isn't merit. He hardly studies it all. It's one thing to be famous but he's just wealthy. If he doesn't like the pressure he should give up the wealth, it's that simple. No one should be richer than a successful doctor. You can't get any more successful than that. People become freaks. They lose all touch with reality. Wealth is a mental illness really and it's attitudes like this that cause it. What is Warmer supposed to do when he grows up? Become sort of a playboy lothario or something? It's a shame all the way around and I think about this poor girl who got kicked out, she's going to have to live with this her entire life."

After this Ira fell silent and we didn't know what more to say. It was a distinctly Whitfield thing to feel somehow flattered to be around such ostentatious problems but to feel rather uncomfortable with the ethical dilemmas some young people faced. Into the middle of our quandary came one of the most

outspoken students in the 11th grade, William Madison Sparks.

Sparks was a thickly built, tall rangy boy from North Carolina. You couldn't say that he was one of the most conservative students on campus because he had so much competition, but he was one of the loudest. He was always trying for special recognition and his attempts to make the football team and his bragging about his SAT scores were well remembered. Sparks and Daryl were always discussing their favorite conservative topics but tonight Sparks had different news. He had decided to put his name in to run for class president and he lost no time in announcing it to us.

Sparks came through the door deliberately like he had something to say. After surveying us haughtily to see if he if he was interrupting he started in..

"You know class elections are coming right up and the winner will be class president until next year. What do you think? I'm going to run. What more could I do to get into an Ivy League college? I think I'm a shoe in but just to be sure I should do this. What do you think? It will be great for you to know the class president eh? Everybody around here is ambitious but some people rise above. This will be a great thing even after college. I will always have been class president for life. I don't know what I want to do after college but I'm sure I'll do great. I say aim for the stars but settle for a stellar salary. That's the thing to do."

"So you're sure you're going to win," Daryl put in sarcastically. "Is there anyone else running?"

"Just a member of the Afro-Whitfield Society. I don't think he has that much support. It's Jamal Anderson. He gets okay grades but I don't think he stands a chance to win against me. We're giving speeches tonight at the old library building. Are you guys going to come? It starts in an hour."

"We'll be there," Ira said. "Did you hear about Augustus Warmer? He went up for action again and he gets to stay in school."

Sparks immediately responded, "Why would they kick him out? He's probably the most famous person in our class. He's an American," he continued enigmatically. "People shouldn't pressure people who are famous and just going through the stages of regular life. Warmer is a victim who has to have a chance to make mistakes. Have you talked to people? The class supports Warmer. He's got a lot of challenges in front of him."

Ira rolled his eyes dramatically at this absurdity but he said, "see you" and waved goodbye when Sparks went off to prepare for his speech. "I swear this place is totally upside down sometimes. I wonder what Sparks is going to say in his speech, probably just a lot of garbage about conservative values. Whitfield caters to the highest bidders for a comforting, square conservative education for affluent young people. It gives a lot of perspective on the college scene, really."

Daryl took exception to this and he started in objecting to Ira's sympathies immediately. "What do you mean, man? Whitfield and colleges too I'm sure represent the values of most Americans. People want to be free to exploit opportunity. Everybody wants prosperity and you don't get that sitting around and waiting for a handout. It's values man, it's values that people need.

I was a little hesitant to jump in because I was often a little less brash than many of my peers. I was torn in those days between feeling humbled by apparently being offered a special opportunity and being a little upset at the double standards and hypocrisy I encountered around me. As the three of us set out for the old library building Daryl kept up his sarcastic, edgy support for everything he thought Whitfield stood for and Ira stayed disgusted, wondering what the speeches would bring.

The old library building was a grand old Georgian structure next to the new library which was a towering modern building that stood at the center of campus. The old library was sort of a student center now and its old marble fixtures welcomed many student groups to a variety of smaller student events. Ira and Daryl and I went upstairs to the big, open meeting room there and found seats near the back. It didn't look like this event would be all that well attended at first but soon people began to straggle in and eventually many of the various groups and individuals found at Whitfield were represented. There was the long distance runner with the eating disorder who represented well some of the

nascent problems that so much pressure on young people to be accomplished brought about. There was also no shortage of preppy fops who embraced their lifestyle now at school with the same spirited enthusiasm with which they chose their ties. Sort of underrepresented at this event for student elections were the academic grinds who were the quiet unrelenting scholars on campus. Ira knew these people well from his class sections because he sort of belonged in this group but their sparse numbers generally paid less attention to student politics than Ira did.

The speeches were kicked off by an address by the current student body president, Jerry Carlson, who had been elected last year during a controversy over the dress code. His opponent had proposed ending the school dress code but Carlson's support for the old ways that brought him a victory in a landslide. Sparks was speaking first this year. He got up from where he was seated with the other speaker behind the portable podium and stepped over to it straitening his tie and putting on a serious face for his speech. Sparks thought of himself as an accomplished speaker and he paused to collect himself for another minute at the podium. At last he took his speaking cards from his jacket pocket and he was ready to begin.

"Hello fellow Whitfielders. It's good to be addressing you here today to ask you to vote for me for class president. There's a lot hanging in the balance this year with important Student Judiciary decisions to support and the future of Whitfield's traditions at stake.

Tradition is where I wanted to begin today and I thought I would open with the quote carved in the stone over the front doors of the Academy Building. `Come hither boys so that you may become men,` it says carved into the stone above the door there. It's a solid reminder of Whitfield's past as a boys' school and I feel it is important that we take stock and remember the key history that has brought us here today to where we are at Whitfield.

Whitfield was founded as a school for boys some 200 years ago and ever since then generations of young men have pursued their studies here with the aim of becoming well-rounded Patrician men. A Whitfield education isn't about leaving learning to type; those are skills to acquire elsewhere. A Whitfield education is about acquiring solid decision-making skills and citizenship skills to fulfill the life of privilege fee-paying Whitfielders were born to.

The thing is, my fellow Whitfielders, that Whitfield is downright American and stands for the solid American values that make corporate America what it is. Whitfield stands for the freedom to prosper and build American family values to what they are today. When young men set out to prepare to go to college they should think of Whitfield as an example for everyone for the achievements that will build America for generations to come.

Whitfield is the opposite of the drug-addled, crime-ridden streets of America and we should keep it that way, Wholesome academic accomplishment is what we

stand for and we need to remember that these things, if they are anything at all, are a minor anomaly in the life of a Whitfielder. To be sure, Whitfield is the end of childhood for many here and the beginning of a graduation to adulthood. It's to be expected that there are mistakes along the way. Some of us here at Whitfield are busy counting off the ways we can be of public service and I hope that Whitfield is just a stopping point in a long life of service for me. Whitfield should be an excellent preparation for service in the United States military and I want to promote that option for anyone who believes in standing for the values that make us great. Discipline, steadfastness and integrity are all the sort of thing that I can bring to the office of class president. There's one thing that I can promise you as I stand here today to ask for your vote and it's honesty. The honesty to conduct my office in a way that enables us all. Thank you very much for your attention and please vote for me, William Madison Sparks, for class president. What we do and say here at Whitfield will be with us long after." Sparks concluded his short speech with an earnest nod and left the podium to return to his chair behind it. The crowd clapped in approval and you wouldn't have thought there was any opposition to Sparks' views present.

Next rose Jamal Anderson from where he was sitting behind the podium. He was greeted by a smattering of applause, Ira enthusiastically among them, and the handsome representative of the Afro-Whitfield society was soon standing behind the podium preparing to speak. "Hello Whitfielders," he began, "I'm glad to be

here today to ask for your vote for class president. We stand today at a crossroads where the future and integrity of Whitfield really is at stake. You have probably heard that one of our classmates has recently received special judicial treatment after going for up for action for a minor, but shameful, infraction. He is still among us in the Whitfield student body while another, younger student, has been sent home to shame. I'm here to promise you that if I am elected class president inequality and unfairness will not be tolerated like this at Whitfield. Among the many mitigating factors considered by the committee in this case was a shameful consideration for the wealth and fame of one of the participants. This is outrageous. In order for Whitfield to continue to have not just the ugly prestige of a reputation for excessive wealth in its student body, Whitfield has to adhere to the nobler values of equality and fairness in its decisions. Academic values demand it. We must be committed to greater idealism than this. Think of all the other students of modest means who go here. Are they all second class students? Is Whitfield just an introduction to corporate values? Myself, I am fortunate to say that my father is a doctor who himself went to a prep school like Whitfield as a precursor to success in his field. But Whitfield needs to nurture the many forgotten toilers who were admitted not because their parents could pay the extravagant fees at Whitfield but because of their promise as citizens and their contribution to the diversity of the student body. Is Whitfield to be just an introduction to the naked power of wealth for them? Whitfield must be a beacon

of progressive values instead of a stodgy old bastion of privileged tradition. It is difficult enough to draw out talented young individuals and put them in positions of prominence where extraordinary pressures happen and the difficulties of life get their start. Whitfield will do best by fostering not just its traditional meritocracy but by experimenting with the kind of society that best fosters social mobility. Indeed mobility is exactly the value that Whitfield tries to promote when they admit students from austere backgrounds but they fall short when they go on to insist that the best preparation for life is a sort of wealth and fame free-for-all where only the wealthiest win. Egalitarianism should be the watch word of a Whitfield education, not privilege. Whitfield swoops low to admit talented underprivileged students but it stops short when they graduate and move on. I can imagine a Whitfield where the dress code went from Brooks Brothers to something as plain and humble as prisonwear. Think of it. No more ridiculous envy and inequality in clothing choices and everyone expressing value for austerity. The world, and Whitfield, should embrace values that are achievable for all to enjoy, not that are tailored for just a few. Whitfield, too, is a coed school now and that modernity is a beginning we have just begun to explore here. Whitfielders should be at the forefront of equality of the sexes, not just mired in age-old prejudices and injustices. There are so many things that Whitfield can be and that is the kind of privilege Whitfielders should embrace, not a reprehensible tradition of deferring to wealth. I ask you to vote for me for class president and cast your ballot

for a new Whitfield and a new America that discovers new values to confront the changing moral landscape we live in. I am your fellow student, Jamal Anderson, and I thank you for your attention.”

14.

Maybe If You Kicked In For Pizza Once In Awhile

Journal

When I woke up the following morning I was in a good mood and so was Amy. Amy bounced out of bed and showered, glad to have some company. I was just glad to have food and I thanked Amy again for lending me the money. Amy said no problem but she went on to explain that she was leaving town within a few days and she would be gone for a couple of weeks.

Amy was going to Massachusetts to do a summer stock theater gig designing costumes and she wouldn't be around. When she said this I thought for a minute and then explained that I would be able to pay her back I hoped when she got back if perhaps I found a job somewhere and could work a little. Then it occurred to me that I could head north to Middlebury and visit Bill

where he was doing a show for the first part of the Summer. It seemed like Vermont would be scenic and it shouldn't take long to catch rides along the mountain highway going North. I conveniently forgot about my wild mountain ride getting there and I hoped there would be no more problems like that. I decided to set out right away. When Amy set out for campus to sort costumes that day I was ready for the road again. This time I had a pack full of food in addition to my odd assortment of clothes and I ate a peanut butter and jelly sandwich as I walked across town, heading for the highway. Birds chirped and dogs barked and cats hung around the mailboxes along the way and I couldn't have been more content as the bleak anonymous hardship of the road set in. I was getting used to it slowly and I began to take a little comfort from the freedom.

I must have looked friendly and harmless that morning because I caught a ride on the edge of town and before I knew it I was headed North out on the route to Middlebury and thinking about what I would do when I got to my destination. "Where are you going," my ride asked laconically, not saying much but generously giving me a ride. He was going just as far as the next town and I was welcome to ride along he said. I said great and checked out the scenery along the way. It seemed that if there were no variety in the makes and models and colors of cars that everything would be relentlessly the same in the different regions that I passed through.

As I walked along the highway eventually I sort of thought to myself about my trip. I longed to just see the

sites and travel without connections to anyone and when I thought about things, I thought about visiting Lake Champlain. It was North near Burlington and I thought it wouldn't be difficult to catch rides up there and check out the area. It turned out to be a good time of day to catch rides and I caught a number of short rides in a row over the next couple of hours. Nice people just out driving errands picked me up and moved my journey along at a snail's pace which was nevertheless faster than walking.

After a while I was walking on a section of highway that had a wide shoulder and I saw a car pull over about 50 yards ahead of me. I saw it was a VW Bug as I jogged ahead to catch up and get in and I saw that the driver was a young person still in their twenties or so. I guessed they were a college student or recently graduated and the guy said, "Hey man, how are you doing?"

I was busy stowing my gear on the floor around my feet as the bug, a type of car which I had never ridden in before, pulled on to the roadway with its distinctive chattering sound from the engine and its stiff bumpy ride from the suspension. The car bumped along and I said I was doing all right and thanks for the ride in reply. "I'm going up to Burlington, maybe to camp out a little around Lake Champlain," I said next and the guy said it's a great area for that and he was going up to Burlington himself that day.

"I went to UVM and I'm living around the area now. I like it here. I'm promoting a big festival that we have

every year down by the lake. There's bands and all kinds of people and it's a great party. You should come on down if you're still around at the end of the Summer."

"Oh wow, I'd like to do that if I can. I don't know where I'll be at the end of the summer but it sounds like a fun festival. Do you know any good places to visit by the lake?"

"There's a lot of places up and down the lake. It's a big lake and the road runs right along it for quite a distance. There's marinas and camping areas and private cottages everywhere." After he found out where I was going, the guy, whose name was Rick, was silent for a while and we made good progress going North. I couldn't believe how loud the old VW was. It was like riding in an old jalopy but I was glad to have a ride and Rick smiled so I lit a cigarette for awhile and just enjoyed the ride. After about an hour we had passed Middlebury and I felt a mild sense of regret about not going straight there to catch up with Bill, but I thought to myself, "I'm a free spirit now," and tried to feel happy about my new destination.

The scenery was very nice out among the farmlands and forest and after a while I decided to get out and look for a place to camp before going all the way to Burlington. As soon as we reached an area around the lake I started looking. It didn't take long before I saw a dirt road leading off into the trees on the lake side of the highway and I quickly decided that this was a quiet area that I wanted to be in and I asked Rick to pull over so I could get out. As the old VW pulled away I was left standing

by the side of the road again with my gear and only a minimal sense of where I was or what I was doing.

My resolve was strong however and I crossed the road and set out hiking down the dirt road which was wide and well maintained. The lake was apparently some distance away because I certainly couldn't see water anywhere but I thought I would pursue my curiosity as far as it would take me and I walked along the shaded road. I kept walking and walking for what must have been a couple of miles before I came to the lake. It looked like a vast inland expanse of water and after a little more walking I soon realized that the road I was on led to a marina that I could see in the distance with numerous buildings and sailboats moored out in the water around a small harbor.

I thought a little about walking all the way to the marina to check it out but I soon decided it would be better to head into the woods along the lakeshore and find a place to camp. It didn't take long in the narrow strip of forest about 100 yards wide between the lake and the road to make my way to the edge of the lake and find some rocks there to sit on. I sat down and surveyed the whole area. There wasn't much going on and I was glad it was quiet. I was too far in the distance to be seen from the marina and on this weekday I guessed that there wouldn't be too many boats moving about on the water. I was starting to get used to slinging off my pack and setting up camp, and the first thing I did was eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. What a grand place to camp I thought and had a moment of deep breath and

recollection which came quite often ever since I started out walking on my trip. I felt I was living in the shadow of privilege and luxury and when I looked over at the marina in the distance I felt like it had been a short year before when I was still at school at Whitfield. I began to think about the dreams I had been having and how it felt the year leading up to what had happened. After that year I was disillusioned of Whitfield and my teenaged optimism took a steep dive.

Where before I had been full of the future and had a sense of privilege, that year I was overcome by a sense of pessimism and no longer counted my blessings in course credits and diplomas. A lot of things happened to change my view; someone died and I lost my sense of enthusiasm for the whole enterprise. I realized thinking about it the way Whitfield was famous in a 1940s Ivy League football sort of way contributed a lot to my bewilderment. I had never had a direct connection to events on TV and in magazines or newspapers before. It was overwhelming really and in my juvenile sort of way I didn't deal with it very well.

I had never realized that there was a solemn downside to notoriety and that a person had to be very sure of himself to handle difficulties in a public way. It was like my life was suddenly as big as I ever imagined it might be and I had not grown enough yet to fill my own shoes. I began to feel very sad after I had eaten. I was sort of emotional and not very steady for a while and sunset neared and I contemplated building a campfire but thought better of it because it would be visible and I

wanted to be left alone. It had been a long three or four days since I resolved to set out on my own and do something drastic with myself.

It was actually only six months since I had dropped out of Whitfield but it felt like forever. I really dated my change of heart to the Spring of the year before. If things had not gone off the rails I would have graduated high school about this time of year and I could hardly think about that because the change was so drastic. I had quit school in November and I went back to public school in January, then dropped out of public school 2 months later in March. It was a real roller coaster.

In a way setting out on my own was another attempt to take control back for my life which had sort of slipped away when I was no longer firmly in the driver's seat of my life like I had been at Whitfield. For me at that time of my life control was a very important thing that I struggled with. Looking back I realized I was trying to accomplish some very big things in my life and live up to my own expectations. I was the first person to go to college in my family and I terrifically underestimated what a leap this would be. I didn't think that pursuing social roles that "called some shots," instead of quietly suffering and toiling would be all that difficult. For me it was this personal thing and I had social challenges that made my ambitions bigger obstacles than most people thought.

All these analyses were yet in the distance for me as I spread out my raincoat on the ground and curled up in my blanket under a juniper bush by the shore that night.

It all seemed too overwhelming and I cried a little before I went to sleep. After I went to sleep I dreamed again. I dreamt back to the night the election results came in at Whitfield. I was at dinner with Ira and Daryl and it was Daryl who announced the results to us.

"I told you so," Daryl began gloating as soon as he came in and sat down. "Whitfield can come through with a decent opinion sometimes. I haven't talked to Sparks yet but I'm sure he's unsufferable. I didn't know how the vote would turn out but I guess if I had to I would have predicted this. Sparks' head will be so big it will be hardly fit into his military cap. Haha conservatism wins out again here at Whitfield."

Ira's face sank and I couldn't believe my ears. I had voted for Anderson and I was sure Ira had too. It was unbelievable really that Sparks was going to be class president. Sparks would actually make a horrible class president. He would be self-satisfied and arrogant and I couldn't imagine anyone less likely to keep their campaign promises. Dinner was some sort of casserole and I picked at it dejectedly. I had lost my appetite and I didn't feel hungry anymore.

Ira said, "Oh great now I suppose we'll have to congratulate him. Has anybody seen him? He is probably busy accepting all his congratulations now. What a disaster!" Ira also seemed to lose his appetite and didn't pay much attention to eating from then on. "The thing is," Ira went on, it's not like the Whitfield class elections are going to be the end of everything but Whitfield has an opportunity to not just rise above, but

stay above, the fray of politics as usual. If people learn it at Whitfield it sticks with them for life. It's just so sad that Whitfielders prefer to cater to the status quo rather than take the opportunity to lead with new ideas. Think of the headlines that it would make if Whitfield really believed in equality like Jamal proposed. Just wanting to stay rich or get rich is so pathetically conservative.

Ira stopped talking to push his food away on his tray but soon continued. "What's Winfield supposed to be except the training ground for sexually unbridled tycoons,"he asked, "I never thought I'd be ashamed to go to Whitfield, but that's the thing, Whitfielders are such unethical cowards. It's not like Sparks concession to ambition, his plan of military service, is going to lead any Whitfielders into battle. They will just continue to salute and genuflect automatically without really thinking about the unacceptable cost of those activities and institutions. A military with Sparks in it would be a military with sexual misconduct problems with people like Sparks deferring endlessly to out of date mores and obsolete customs. Sparks would stand up for nothing that didn't benefit his careerism.

"You're just sore losers," Daryl rejoined," Whitfield is as prestigious as it gets for a reason and it's because we think about real problems society has and come up with practical, conservative solutions. You can't just legislate ideals and expect the world to change all at once. Things take time and stability and if conservative inertia characterizes the most people then their leaders should reflect that." Daryl was enjoying his dinner immensely

and was about to go to back up to the front for seconds soon. "This thing with Warmer will blow over. What would you feel like if it was you? You're just jealous. Warmer is only making mistakes that all the other guys in the school wish they could make."

Ira went on again when Daryl went up for second helpings, "There should be a revolt. Whitfield should be upset. I'm tired of the same old favoritism and self-serving answers to problems. Sometimes I wonder if Whitfield could be Whitfield without this sort of self-serving attitude. Whitfield just doesn't want to alienate Warmer from future contributions to the endowment, but they are undermining any principles they might still stand for with venality like this."

Soon Daryl came back and began eating again while Ira said, "Whitfielders are addicted to upper middle class creature comforts. Even the ultra rich like Warmer should live austere if they want to attend Whitfield. It's like there's a tradition of bloated deference to wealth and it's just wrong. It should be a privileged to participate in a special enclave of austerity like Whitfield has the privilege of being. Austerity should be admired in the context of education. It's the place where that really could change society, and society really does need to change. It's scandalous that there is so much inequity. It's inequity that's the root of the most intractable problems of society like crime and ignorance. Some people just get discouraged and abandon law and order when they are confronted with inequity. It is the story of history that greedy wealthy

people exploit the large mass of humanity that is willing to go along to get along with accretions of wealth. They try to suggest it is inevitable because of this widely held opinion. It's not. What is inevitable is crime when you get an inevitably resentful minority that feels desperate to feel equal respect. Crime isn't like the excuses of Warner where privileged people overreach their boundaries, that's an unusual occurrence. Crime is when people treated unfairly get fed up and break the rules to clumsily right injustices."

I had had enough dinner by then and I got up to go. Ira and Darryl were done too and we all gathered up our books and left the dining hall. Outside it was dark and cold but we were in no hurry to get back inside so we made our way along the walkway back to MacMillan Hall at a snail's pace, sort of enjoying the brisk night after being in the warm dining hall. We were relatively quiet after having talked ourselves out over Sparks' win.

"What are you doing tonight," Daryl asked, and I began to sort of shift gears to imagine the rest of the evening. It was Friday and Whitfield held classes on Saturday morning so I had a little bit of homework to do but not a lot. "Not too much, maybe studying a little," I said not really having any plans but generally feeling down so expecting to take it easy.

Ira was silent. He always studied so he didn't have to announce his plans. It was only a couple of hundred yards from the dining hall to the dorm so we were in the lobby of MacMillan Hall in no time. I said, "Well I'll

call you later," and we all split off to head to our rooms.

Upstairs in my room I closed the door and took off my tie. With it being dark outside I turned on the light which was warm and yellow in the late winter cold. I laid down on my bed and realized I was still feeling dejected from the news about Sparks. Depression seemed to come in waves at Whitfield. You were either on top of the world or nothing seemed to be going right. Tonight was the latter. I couldn't shake my sense of impending doom and the more I thought about it the more worried and desperate I became.

If people like Sparks were going to lead the world what hope was there? The same old problems of unfairness that plagued the world today were only going to be perpetuated. It would be the same old tailspin of unjust hierarchy and unfair accumulations of wealth. I felt restless and down and I didn't stay long laying down on my bed. At Whitfield it was like that and I seldom stayed in bed when I was down and depressed. It was like there was too much other trouble to get into so I got up and decided to wander around and talk to people in the dorm. At first I just walked the halls.

I went to the other side of the building to see if anyone else was around and I found Jim Baker right away. Jim was sitting in his room with a box of candy and snacks that he was trying to sell. I had never seen this before so I was like, "What's up with the candy?"

Jim, who was this sophomore a year behind me was quick to explain. He had taken some extra money on his credit card and gone to the Whitfield snack bar and bought a bunch of snacks on the speculation that he would be able to sell them in the dorm after check-in. He planned to make a profit for his efforts and asked if I wanted to buy anything.

I was out of money from my work study job but I didn't tell him this because somehow it didn't seem upperclassman-like to be broke around the lowerclassmen. I just said, "No thanks," even though I was thinking to myself that I should have eaten more dinner and I was getting a little hungry. Jim went on about all this money he was going to make and pretty soon I started to ask him about his theory of profitmaking.

"So you think by making an investment you deserve to receive extra profit as a return on your risk? What makes you think taking a risk is worth money? Isn't it just bullying other people's needs or desires into giving you some extra?" I was pretty fed up with hearing all of Sparks' rhetoric so I was really letting him have it.

Jim got indignant. He said of course he should be able to turn a profit, what was wrong with that and then I replied that I thought there was a lot wrong with it. It just perpetuated existing inequities and created a sense of entitlement among those who had resources to invest. Jim was like, that's crazy this was the way it's always been done and I said yeah exactly, there's a better way and there needs to be change.

"Yeah sure," Jim said and I wandered on down the hallway without buying anything. From there I went downstairs to the common areas and sat down for a moment. Nobody ever watched TV at Whitfield so the common rooms were empty. It didn't take long before I was out in the hall near the doorway and there was Tom Marner, letting himself into the suite downstairs. He motioned for me to come over and come in. I was feeling restless so I obeyed.

Once inside things were quieter than last time but there was a party going on. When I got to the inner room I saw that Tim Robbins, and Krishna Deerfield and Sparks were there. They greeted me and said hey how's it going as I came in with Marner and took a seat, "We're having a victory celebration party for Sparks." Apparently they were all stoned and having a conversation about Sparks' victory. I wasn't very enthusiastic but I kept silent with my criticism at first to see what they had to say.

"Now I'll get into an Ivy League school for sure," Sparks said, "then it's into law school and the military for a short stint before I get out and get into politics. I've got it all planned out. I'm going to run for president of the United States and I'm going to ask Augustus Warmer to contribute to my campaign when it's time to run. Warmer will be one of the richest people in the world by that time and he'll be glad to help me."

Deerfield was next with the ubiquitous Whitfield sarcasm. "Yeah and we can all come over to the Oval Office and do bong hits. Are you going to run on a legalized marijuana platform? But then again does

anybody really know Warmer?" Deerfield was a senior so everybody deferred to him but Sparks with his newly gained status wasn't really ready to back down.

"Well at least I've got a better chance of success than anyone else here," Sparks said.

"It's not like I knew Jamal Anderson just because he's in the Afro-Whitfield Society," Tim Robbins spoke up in his thick Harlem accent.

"Oh you're such a genius, Tim, maybe if you kicked in for pizza once in awhile Anderson would know you," Marner said in his usual bullying tone.

"Nice one, Marner, you're about as sensitive as Warmer and the crowd he hangs out with," Deerfield put in. "Warmer doesn't hang out with anyone that's worth that's worth less than a couple million dollars as a teenager. Apparently he just doesn't feel comfortable with commoners."

"What do you do when you're ultra rich?" Marner asked his question and packed another bong hit. I couldn't believe Marner really cared because he was pretty well off himself, but apparently he did because when he got the hit ready he passed the bong to me and I was feeling down so I didn't refuse. He asked, "Do you know Warmer, Carmichael, or do you just not pay attention to wealth?"

"Well I was in the same English class as Warmer last year. He was kind of removed from most people. I didn't

really get to know him. It was like his wealth put up a barrier," I said.

"Oh so wealth puts up a barrier," Deerfield asked and Sparks looked up from his magazine. Neither of them looked like they agreed. I was a little uncomfortable as I smoked the free bong hit in front of them."

I finished the bong hit and blew the smoke into a rolled up towel as a filter and I was immediately feeling kind of woozy. Then I reacted to Marner and started talking.

"Warmer's wealth doesn't do him any good and it doesn't do anyone else any good either. Warmer has this twisted, aloof relationship to the rest of the world that doesn't relate to anyone else. I'd sympathize and think he was lonely if so many people weren't so attracted to his celebrity status, but that's just the thing, can you imagine what your view of other people would be like with so many people interested in your money? It would be like living on a desert island surrounded by assistants who overcharged you for everything. Financial resources are like that. They insulate you from ordinary cares in such a way that you become warped. Have you ever noticed Warmer's lugubrious, slow-to-care way of talking. He is in a situation that's different from everybody else and it's just gone wrong." Everybody kept their cards close to their vest in the way that people did at Whitfield. People kept their distance in a sort of saving-face, poke-with-a-10-ft-pole sort of way did they did it Whitfield.

Tim Robbins was especially straight-faced where he sat and I wished he would share about his experience too and then he did. He talked with his thick accent and remarkably stopped short of chastising Sparks or the others. Instead he congratulated Sparks, who handed him a free bong hit.

"Sparks you're all right. I would have voted for you if I was a junior and I've been here at Whitfield for a while now. I think you're going in the right direction. It's every man for himself and people have to keep that in mind. I'm applying for a Summer internship at an investment Bank on Wall Street. I hope I get a Summer job as an assistant. The internship is likely sort of button down and uptight but I feel like I can still be a standout tough guy to counterbalance that. Thanks to you guys I have an edgy side. When I came to Whitfield I was a square churchgoing kid. That's how I got picked to come here but with you guys to hang around with and show me the ropes on how to smoke pot and especially for your letting me smoke for free I feel like a regular tough guy. People talk about how square and conservative Whitfield is but you guys give the lie to that. You know how to act like edgy, tough guys in your spare time so that no one who knows you would accuse you of being square. It changes the way a guy thinks of himself. That's a whole other side to Whitfield that you guys keep up. I don't know yet if your sort of masculinity will fit into the financial industry but I think it will. Wearing a tie and so forth in public and doing drugs and talking smack behind closed doors is something I would never have thought of a few short years ago but it's like this

has been an introduction to some of the conflicting influences that an adult has to deal with. If I had stayed in Harlem I would have been on guard against drugs and edginess but it's like you made it possible for me to have a whole different side to my personality.”

15.

## Our Town

### Journal

When I awoke the next morning I wasn't very refreshed because the ground and the rocks by the lake were hard but the air was crisp and cool and there was a sort of surreal glow to the lake as the sun came up over the trees. I was a little reluctant to leave but I knew I didn't want to hang around and get caught trespassing so I ate a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and packed up my gear and surveyed the beautiful scenery one last time before starting out walking on the road back to the highway. I was running out of peanut butter and jelly and bread and I had gotten used to eating regularly again so I told myself I would have to do something about food when I got to Middlebury.

There was a dewy chill in the air and as I walked on the road through the forest I met no cars on the way. It seemed that I had been lucky and found a fairly deserted place for the night so I was glad of that. Being on my own seemed full of extreme ups and downs and I felt elated at the scenery for a half hour as I walked and then was suddenly brought back to reality when I reached the highway and morning traffic was rushing by.

I turned South and stuck my thumb out for a while noticing how self-absorbed and intent upon their destinations the early morning drivers seemed. People didn't seem eager for a passenger at that time of morning so I resigned myself to walking until the sun was a little higher in the sky. Time passed quickly as the morning chill warmed up.

About 9:30AM I caught my first ride with a friendly old man in a pickup who was headed in the right direction. As I rode along I told him I was up in the area camping out for the Summer and that I was hoping to get to Middlebury that day where I expected to get a job. The old man was savvy and said I should check out some of the restaurants around there so I could get my meals for free. This seemed like an especially promising idea and I kept it in mind the whole way into town that day. The ride with the old man only went on for about 20 miles before he had to turn off and I said I had to stick to the road to Middlebury. I was encouraged by the idea of eating at work so I was elated as I got out and started walking again.

It was close to noon before I got another ride and I walked patiently along on the sunny and pleasant day. I was glad of the weather because it would help me get rides I thought. I was a naturally patient person so I was sort of resigned and calm as I waited and consoled myself with the thought that I was making progress by walking along as I waited for the intermittent cars to come by. I was starting to get a sense of the rhythm of the road with the cars coming out on the hour and at rush times in the morning, at noon and at night and it was comforting to be a little more oriented to my surroundings.

But it wasn't very comfortable I thought as I walked further along the highway and the sun rose high in the sky. I worried about my feet and felt a little lame after a few days of constant walking. The scenery up in the Green Mountains seemed unchanging. As I walked I thought about people who might give me a ride and I realized that only a few of the people passing would even consider picking up a rider. To me it didn't seem that unusual because I had never picked up a rider in my times driving and it seemed normal to be cautious. People were different I thought and some people were just more sympathetic to people looking for a ride. There were always a few people with prurient purposes but generally most people who picked you up were just trying to be generous.

It took another hour or two in the midday sun before somebody pulled over to the side of the road and I was able to catch up and climb in. The ride was a plain older

car and the driver was a youthful looking man dressed in ordinary casual clothes sort of like a salesman and I got in and said, "How are you doing?"

The man smiled in an especially welcoming sort of way and said, "I'm just great. What a beautiful day. Where are you going?"

I replied that I was trying to get to Middlebury and he replied that he was going all the way to Rutland so he'd be able to give me a ride all the way there if I wanted. I was relieved that I would make it that day to Middlebury and wouldn't have to find a temporary place again for the night. "Thanks, that would be great," I said.

The man who said his name was Liam after I told him my name was David was fairly quiet for a little ways down the road and then he made polite small talk about the weather this Spring and said that he hoped there would be plenty of rain this Summer. I said I could appreciate the need for rain for a good growing season though I was especially interested in sunshine because I was out traveling around. The man then politely asked if I was just traveling in New England or if I had bigger plans, and I said I wasn't sure yet but I hoped to get a job in Middlebury to make some money. At this the man said he knew a good church in Middlebury, the First Congregational, and wondered if I ever went to church. I said I had as a kid but it had been a while since I attended church.

I was a little taken aback by this statement and it felt awkward to have someone asking for commitments and responsibilities from a stranger but I could deal with it. "No thanks," I said.

After that the guy was silent for a while and I was glad we were making good progress to Middlebury. Liam said he was the pastor of a church back in Burlington and that every Sunday a handful of new people gave their lives to Jesus. I said I didn't really not believe in Jesus just to make him feel better but I stood my ground and kind of became silent. It was a pretty quiet ride.

Eventually we made it to the highway outside of Middlebury and he dropped me off. "Good luck and remember Jesus," Liam concluded and I said thanks, I would. It was a relatively long walk over to the town of Middlebury but I was refreshed and ready for it and the mileage walking went by quickly. Middlebury was a town on a hillside with a common area next to a small river in the middle of town and it seemed inevitable to go to the center of town and sit on a bench I found there.

I sat down a minute with my belongings which I felt sort of gave me away as a traveler so I was on my best behavior. I was at a loss about how to find Bill and I wondered where his play was rehearsing. As I sat I spied a bulletin board standing a short distance away near the bandstand in the middle of the park I was in, and I decided to wander over to see what was on it. I left my pack on the bench and felt free and unencumbered in the deserted park as I went over.

When I got to the postings I began earnestly reading them hoping for information about my surroundings and I was rewarded for my efforts. A big printed poster announced the production of "Our Town" by Thornton Wilder and gave the location of the show. This will be easy I thought. I just have to find the building where it's being put on and I should find Bill. The only problem was that I had no idea where the address was to go to it. The poster didn't include directions so I guessed it was a pretty well known landmark though and went back to the bench with the new information. I wondered if I could find a nearby store or somewhere to ask for directions.

But before I could get very far I noticed someone else in the park and realized it was getting towards evening and that I should find a place for the night. There were buildings and houses on every side of the park so at first I was at a loss for a direction to go in to find a deserted place to sleep. The lay of the land was sort of difficult to grasp because the river ran through town in a sort of deep gorge with a bridge above it at the level of the park and the town center. After a little observation I decided that the side of town with the river was the likeliest spot to find an area of woods and I decided to set out on the street that led away from the town center in the direction of the river.

There didn't seem to be an accessible path along the river so I just wandered along the street for a ways until I came to a school where there was a playing field and some trees on the far side where the river might pass

through. It was a deserted, late spring day and I didn't see anyone around. I took a while to reach the far side of the field but I was rewarded when I got there because a short way into the woods I found the river and a place to camp. It seemed like a good spot down on the flood plain of the river over an embankment. I noticed a stack of weathered plywood that was apparently left in the bushes next to the playing field. It didn't seem to have a use and it had been there for a while so it occurred to me that I

could put some on the ground where I slept and lean two big pieces together over it to keep off the rain. I busied myself doing this for an hour or so. When it was done I was pleased with myself that I had a little shelter hidden away in the trees and bushes next to the river.

Next I ate from my dwindling packages of bread and peanut butter and planned out the next day of finding Bill and looking for a job. I still remembered the ride's suggestion that I see if I could find a restaurant job because then I could get free meals. I would have to see if I could find any restaurants in town as well as find the building where Bill rehearsed on the next day. When I thought about it my industry pleased me.

I didn't know what it was but it occurred to me that my diligence was productive and satisfying. It was different somehow than when I had been trying to maintain existing relationships with my parents and coworkers. The freedom of my new situation thrilled me and I felt more active than any time before except when I was away at school. There wasn't much more area to camp

in, just my camouflaged lean- to in the skunk weeds next to the river so I spread out my blanket and crawled into my shelter to read the poetry book I had in my pack.

The book was thick and heavy but I was glad to have it along at times like these as I tried to pass the time alone and after browsing through the book for a little while I found myself sort of trying to think of poems to write down in my notebook. After a while I wrote a poem:

A night on the road  
Darkness at arms length all around  
A thousand fears ignored because  
There was nothing to do about them.  
Night in a strange anonymous place  
Sometimes the sky above  
Sometimes not. Under a tree or a  
Lean-to  
Straying from peopled areas  
And the roads and streets .  
To be alone on my own  
Hiding from everyone.

As I finished up the poem I heard something in the bushes, a woodchuck or raccoon I told myself and stayed still and waited for it to pass. It didn't take long

to fall completely asleep after the long day of walking outside and I dreamed again.

This night I dreamed I was at home and after my junior year at Whitfield was over. It was soon after school had finished and I was already working in a restaurant, where I spent the day in the kitchen, chopping up vegetables and preparing food for the line cooks and customers. It was about 5PM in the afternoon and I had just come home to my parents' little house and came through the kitchen door while my mother was preparing dinner and my father was just home from where he worked at the office at the local water company. He was sitting in his chair watching TV news and I came into the living room and watched standing up for a minute or two. The local news was doing a national news segment.

A picture of the front of Whitfield flashed across the screen and I immediately focused on it. There was a student standing out in front of the Academy Building of the school. I didn't recognize him at first but then the announcer mentioned a name.

"A prestigious Whitfield Academy student was killed last evening on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Tim Robbins, a scholarship student who just graduated from the school was shot by an undercover police detective and died later that night at the hospital. Reports say he was attempting to rob a stranger who turned out to be a detective after he and his brother John struggled with him over his wallet."

“Do you know that guy,” his father asked, sitting next to where I was standing.

“Yeah he's in my dorm,” I replied suddenly wary of providing too many details of my acquaintance. I had never had anything to do with a national news story before although a gossip woman from the Town Courier, a local free newspaper, had called his mother once and when his mother mentioned that he was home visiting from school the woman printed it in the newspaper. But this was nothing like a line in the local news. This was big news from New York City and at first I was suspicious and didn't believe that Tim had done anything wrong. It just didn't make sense. I had never seen him doing anything wrong that I wouldn't do and there must be more to the story I thought.

I sort of froze there in the living room as my mother came in from the kitchen and asked, “Is there something about Whitfield on TV?”

Then I answered that someone was killed by a police officer in New York, and they were somebody I knew from my dorm that had just graduated. “Oh what happened,” my mother asked.

“Well the police say he was mugging them,” I said, “but I don't think it could be true.”

“Oh that's too bad,” my mother replied and watched the TV for a minute. Nobody had any experience with bad news reports so there was a sort of awkward silence. Fortunately my parents didn't ask if I mugged anyone because I guess they assumed I was law-abiding

and well-behaved. After another awkward moment passed I made my way to the stairs to my little room on the second floor where I could absorb the news alone. It was where I was headed when I came in from work but everything had changed. It felt strange to have a connection to the drama of national news. Eventually after a dinner where I was the only one who was a little tense and not much more was said about the new story I decided to go out and hang out with some friends from town.

I called Jerry Green, my friend from town, on the phone in the kitchen of my parents house. I asked what was up and he said come over because he was just hanging out. So I hopped in my father's truck and drove across town to where Jerry lived and found him watching TV in the family room of his parents' home.

"Hey there was this guy on the news from that school you go to. Did you know him," he asked as I came in.

"Yeah he was in my dorm," I replied slowly, apprehensive about the unusual news but glad at least that it wasn't my parents asking again.

"What do you guys do up there at that school? The news said he was mugging a cop."

"No, nobody mugs anybody at Whitfield. It's all pretty square actually. This guy was from from Harlem. I don't know what his home was like."

"That's pretty tough, mugging a cop," Jerry said. Jerry had a knack for getting in trouble with the local police

himself. He knew a lot of the town cops and was friends with a lot of the tougher guys in school.

He lived close to town so he had run with a lot of the downtown crowd through Elementary School. In many ways he wasn't really the delinquent type in that his parents were successful and he always had enough money to get by, but he just seemed to be a sort of trouble magnet with a knack for coming up with illicit ideas that wasn't very prudent. The big thing about Jerry was that he was a very personable guy. He got along with a lot of types of people and knew a lot of people. That was how I knew him. He always seemed to have time to hang out so even though he had just graduated from school because he was a year ahead of me and I found myself hanging out with him. Going to private school somehow made me a little bit of a celebrity at home.

"Hey, want to get some beers," Jerry asked and I said, "Yeah why not." So we got ourselves together and climbed into my father's truck for a trip to the store. Although we were 17 and 18 years old buying beer wasn't all that difficult in some places. It was decided that I looked older so I would go to get the beer at this place near the next town over. Usually when I bought beer I would try to dress like an older person. I would wear my Whitfield clothes into the store to look older. I probably didn't fool anybody and it was just that the stores were relaxed about checking IDs but to myself I thought it was how I looked and I put a lot of effort into evading the system.

On this night though I didn't have very old-looking clothes so I was a little apprehensive about going in. "You never buy beer Jerry. I don't have my raincoat and tie with me tonight. Do you think we'll get carded?"

Jerry replied as usual in his smoothtalking way that I looked old enough and he always got carded at this place so I should go in. They knew him and knew how old he was he said. So when we got to the store we pooled our money together and I took a deep breath and went in. There was a woman behind the counter who looked serious but there was no one else around so I went to the cooler and got a 12-pack and then went up to the counter. The woman, who I was guessed about 40, didn't even look at me as she announced the price and I paid her. I felt elated as I left the store with my beer in a bag and Jerry, who was the more experienced criminal, kept a straight face until we were headed out again in search of a place to drink.

I said I didn't know of any good places but Jerry said we can go to "the pit," which wasn't very far away and he gave me directions to follow. When we got there it was a dirt road leading back into the woods where there was a deserted gravel pit and we parked the truck as dusk was beginning to fall. To me drinking illicit beer in a gravel pit was a lot different than smoking marijuana with the other boys at Whitfield but when you thought about it there really wasn't that much difference. Somehow sitting and drinking with Jerry I felt like if there were more trouble to get into in the small town where we lived he would find it and get into it.

That night we drank the beers and I went home at a reasonable hour in order not to alert my parents and I worked at the restaurant the next day. The restaurant was as lame as ever and I was still adjusting to the mundane life of working in a kitchen. I never really could get used to the difference between the glamorous life of going to private school and the news the day before only had me even more aware of the differences. I kept wondering if someone else was going to notice the news and mention something to me and I felt like a different person somehow. Of course the other cooks didn't say anything but then this guy who lived a couple of towns over came in and I started talking to him and he said, "Hey don't you go to a big private school or something. There was this guy in the news last night who got killed mugging a cop. Did you know him?"

"Yeah I know him. He lived in my dormitory," feeling about twice as tough as I actually was. After that the guy whose name was Jamie started treating me like I was some sort of celebrity and was kidding me about being some sort of hardened criminal. It was awkward being connected to the news and I didn't really know what to say. I still didn't believe Tim could have been doing anything wrong but I didn't know what actually happened so I was a little hesitant to talk about it. It just didn't make sense to me that Tim would have just jeopardized his future like that but something had happened, that was for sure, and the question was just what. Jamie kept on kidding me well into the Summer. Hanging out with Jerry again and in July I really started doing some uncharacteristic things. It was another night

off from the restaurant and I called Jerry who came over like he always did. We were driving around looking for something to do and he went into a convenience store to buy some cigarettes and when we came out again Jerry showed me an extra pack he had ripped off by sticking them in his pocket when no one was looking. We weren't really out of money so we didn't need them but it was kind of a thrill to steal them.

After this I felt kind of square next to Jerry who was really casual about what he had done. I didn't know what to think really. It just made breaking the rules seem even cooler than it had at Whitfield where it was sort of a badge of honor. Somehow at Whitfield I was introduced to illicit acts in a circumstance that made consequences seem remote and unlikely to affect my personal circumstances. It was like there was a meaningful ironic tension around rule-breaking that made it seem like it was a sort of growth of character not just a sordid bit of anomalous behavior.

I sort of forgot about Jerry's exploits as we smoked the illicit cigarettes out at a deserted camp by a nearby lake. Jerry and I spent a lot of time in the next town over around the small Lake there where there were a number of small camps. This one belonged to the parents of another friend from the local school and it was easy to slip inside and have the place to ourselves. Inside there was another an old propane stove and some dilapidated furniture that was more comfortable than sitting on the picnic table outside. I don't know why but I sort of liked this other side of life that I was

exploring. It was somehow more exciting and didn't seem as mundane as my parents' lives. It was something I could identify with and I always had this sense that I was just somehow a more well-rounded and experienced person because of these sorts of things which weren't very new to Jerry. Jerry smoked and talked his smooth talk until I felt almost like a different person by the time we got tired of hanging out and enjoying someone else's surroundings, but eventually it was the end of the afternoon and we went back to Jerry's parents' car which was parked in the driveway at the camp and headed down the road where Jerry pulled into another convenience store.

We didn't really need anything, Jerry just said he wanted a soda. But we both went in and walked around the store for a few minutes. It was then that I saw Tim's picture on the front cover of a news magazine and it suddenly struck me that I had to have that magazine so while Jerry paid for the soda I looked around to see if anyone was watching and slipped the magazine into my shirt. I sort of thought it would be cool or thrilling to be stealing but I actually felt just more restless and bored.

When we left the store the clerk followed me out and asked me to give back the magazine. I didn't know what else to do so I was kind of aloof and defiant as I handed over the magazine, glad the clerk didn't call the cops. It seems somehow that I was getting closer and closer to trouble that summer and as he pulled away Jerry just said, "That was a close one, man."

Jerry had been caught doing things like shoplifting before and he was totally slack jawed and cool about the whole thing, but to me it just felt kind of silly to have brought about such an awkward and objectionable moment over something so minor. I really felt kind of foolish and it occurred to me to imagine what it must have felt like for Tim to be shot and realizing that he was caught and maybe even being conscious after they took him to the hospital. Somehow it all became sort of pressing and close to home when I had my own experience of getting caught. Of course I didn't tell my parents about any of this after Jerry dropped me off but it struck me stuck with me the rest of the Summer and afterwards.

16.

## Hitting The Road

### Journal

In the morning I woke up feeling like something had changed. I was situated at a semi-permanent camp and I was planning to stay for a week or two and somehow I felt different. It was early morning on the road so there was a minor chill in the air and I felt sort of isolated and alone in a way that contrasted with how I felt the night before. I decided to carry my belongings with me because it didn't feel very safe to leave them at the lean-to but I didn't have that much so it worked out.

I set out for the center of town and decided to walk around a little while it was still early to see what I could check out. There was a road leading out of the town which seemed to pass nearby to the college so I went that way for a little ways and checked out the area. The

college was big and situated on a hill and it was quiet at this time of day in the early Summer. I knew I would be visiting there again so I didn't stay very long after I found the library and I started back towards town on the other side of the river. Along the way I saw a sign for a restaurant that looked promising. It was called "The Bistro " and looked like it was located a little way off the road so I wandered down the driveway to take a look. About 500 yards into the trees on the other side of the river from where I camped there was a hidden parking lot and a medium-sized building that looked like it might have been built for something other than a restaurant. Once I saw the building I decided I would try to apply there later in the day and I turned around and went back up the road.

Once in town I felt like I had made a good start on the day's accomplishments and I went into a small general store there at the side of the park. I didn't really need to buy anything but I asked at the counter if anyone could give me directions to the Congregational Church, which is where the poster had said to play was being produced. As it turned out the church was just over at the other side of the park and I said thank you and left. It was just a short walk from there over to the church where I decided to wait and see if Bill would show up.

It was about an hour later at 10AM in the morning that I saw Bill approaching with some other people and I called out, "Hey Bill," and I was glad I sort of blended in and didn't especially need a shower yet on my trip. He broke off from the group he was with and came over

to see me for a minute. "What are you doing here, man," he asked, greeting me with a hug which was one of the mannerisms he had apparently acquired hanging out with the new theater troupe.

"I'm hitchhiking," I said, "I just came up from visiting Amy in Barrington. She says hi. What are you doing today?"

"Well I have rehearsal all day," Bill said looking a little torn and sorry to disappoint me. There was kind of an awkward pause as I realized Bill was busy with a lot of intern responsibilities and wouldn't be able to hang out and that I couldn't really hang around the theater troupe at rehearsal. I slowly sort of took this in as Bill asked if I needed anything in his usual thoughtful way and I asked if I could borrow a little money. I felt like a bum but that was the circumstances I was in and I explained that I was looking for a job. Bill said sure and loaned me \$10 which I told him I would pay back as soon as possible and then Bill had to hurry up to catch the group of people he was with who had gone into the church. "Got to go man, catch up with me when you can okay?"

Bill trotted off after his co-interns and I said "See you" and headed back to the middle of the park where I hung out until after lunch time when I thought it would be a good time to visit the restaurant I had found. There wasn't much going on but I was in a good spirits because I had some money in my pocket and good prospects for the day.

When about 2PM arrived I headed over to the restaurant and left my pack in the bushes outside while I went in and asked if I could apply for any positions. I filled out an employment application and this fellow who said he was the kitchen manager looked at it and said I could be a prep cook if I came back tomorrow at 10AM to start. I was excited and said, "You bet, I'll see you," then I went back outside and retrieved my pack. Fortunately no one bothered it because everything I had in the whole world was contained in that pack.

After that I hiked back to the park for a while then wandered back to camp where I got ready to sleep a little before sundown. I was beginning to realize how much passing the time had to do with traveling and being on my own and I prepared myself for general boredom in my time off for the immediate future. I thought about writing in my journal but I also realized with chagrin that concentrating to write was not very easy on the road and I lowered my expectations on that front.

It was another sort of eventful night in the bushes around my shelter with a few startling noises from time to time but I generally slept through the night and felt refreshed and ready to work the next morning. I quickly started a sort of routine where I went to the park for a while in the morning then went over to the restaurant where I wrapped up my pack tightly and neatly and stored it in the employee coatroom for my shift. Work was pretty mundane at the restaurant. I cut vegetables and did odd jobs and sneaked food whenever I could. It

was a pretty relaxed place and there were only a couple of other workers during the day. I guess I was glad it was mellow because I wanted it to go smoothly and I got a schedule for the next two weeks which included some night shifts. I was glad I was learning to not be afraid of the dark because finding my lean-to in the dark was pretty challenging.

On my first night shift I was put on the deep fryer out in the main kitchen and I was in charge of cooking "the frites" as they were called and I got to look at the strange dishwasher washer of the place. I tried not to stare as I observed another man young man, sort of college-age I guess, who was the strangest young man I had ever seen. Instead of being all slack jawed and cool like the other cooks around the chef this guy was a freak. You can see some odd things in rural university towns I guess but this guy was the strangest. He was rocked back on his heels, bent forward with his back arched at the same time and he held his hands out and twisted back in front of him all at the same time. He talked in a piercing, shrieking falsetto and it was like there was no way to be calm when you had to ask him for something. It was like he was determined to express alarm and outrage as much as possible all at the same time.

"What's up with him," I asked the cook.

"Oh he dropped out of school and he's upset about something. Don't worry about him, he's crazy," the cook said.

"Oh wow, I hope I never I'm never that crazy," I said before going back to my station.

Apart from the dishwasher it was pretty uneventful at the restaurant. At the end of the night after the kitchen closed everybody hung out at the bar for a little while and most people were pretty mellow except me. The dishwasher went home. I was on guard because I didn't want to tell anyone that I was just passing through and didn't intend to stay for the Summer. I made up a story about being a college student and I didn't stay long. Everybody got a free shift drink and I had a beer before I left each day. I would have to be careful I thought to myself as I walked home in the dark. My college story explained why I had an out-of-state address on my job application so that was good.

In those days I often pretended I was in college although my real feelings were very anti-college. I guess I wanted to fit in with my friends but I wanted to venture out on my own at the same time. The two weeks working really seemed to go past pretty uneventfully because there wasn't much else to do except hang out in the park and work.

Once payday came I was elated. I picked up my check at the end of my shift and left without saying goodbye. It wasn't so much that I disliked the job as that I wanted to be elsewhere. Bill was busy with his run and I had been thinking about what I was going to do once I got paid for the two weeks that I was working and hanging out. The idea was taking me over that I wanted to set out to see the Pacific Ocean. I

had traveled a little around the Western United States as a little as a boy with my grandparents but I had never gone to California.

My goals were only vaguely formed and I didn't know if I would try to stay in California when I got there or if it would just be a sightseeing trip but I was sure I wanted to set out. With my paycheck I bought a bunch of food and some beer as a sort of reward for my efforts. I had been living on very little and eating at the restaurant all along so it was a welcome change. The big thing was to catch up with Bill to pay him back and say goodbye. Bill's show was playing now and they had finished rehearsal so I went over to the church that night to the show. Bill was busy again getting ready so I just tracked him down in the confusion and handed him the money and said thank you. I told him I was leaving town the next day so to go visit Amy in Barrington and he quickly wished me well while he was focused on something else. "Say hi to Amy for me," he said.

That night I was having a good time by myself at my lean-to but I was definitely glad to be leaving the little place behind. I smoked and drank beer and ate some nuts I bought until I felt fell asleep and then I packed up and hit the road again in the morning. Rides weren't too difficult because it was a Saturday morning and I made decent time getting down to Barrington to find Amy. It seemed like all the local rides began to blur together the more I hitchhiked. Like before they were usually local people out doing errands who would pick an innocent-looking kid on the road like me and it seemed like

drivers talked less than they did it first as well. It was always just one driver in the car and I was always glad to have a ride.

To find Amy when I got to Barrington I went first to the to the rooming house where she had been staying before she set out on her internship and instead of finding her there I found a guy that had been there hanging around when I visited before and he recognized me and said hello. I was just sitting on the step smoking a cigarette and I said hey back.

"What are you doing? You look like you're traveling," the friendly guy said.

I said yes feeling cavalier and I went on to explain that I had been up to Lake Champlain and around Middlebury for a while. "Do you know where Amy is," I asked.

"No, I haven't seen her for a few weeks. I have just been trying to get some writing done."

"Oh, you're a writer" I said, interested.

Then he said he was a student in creative writing at Barrington. I was prejudiced against workshop writers and I had a sort of lone wolf idea of my own about how to be a good writer. I was really pretty out of touch and unrealistic when you thought about it. The guy, who said his name was Rick, went on about how fiction was hard to sort of pace he thought and I envied him without saying anything and wondered how I would ever get to producing anything myself. It seems like I constantly promised myself I would get to it but I never

did. After my cigarette I said they had to go find Amy and Rick said, "Nice to meet you, see you around."

I guessed that Amy would be at the theater department so I started walking again up to campus and when I got to the theater department this time I knew exactly where to go. Amy was there in the wardrobe room and I was glad to see her. "Hello sunshine," she said, "you need a shower."

I admitted that yes I did need a shower and told her I had some money to pay her back. She said she was housesitting for a professor and we could stay there tonight. It was kind of a shock to my system to be part of civilization again but I adapted quickly. The first thing I did when we got there was hop in the shower and scrub off and I was amazed at how dirty I had gotten. There was a washer and dryer for my clothes and after a couple hours I was a new person again and it awakened to a sort of nostalgia in me for regular life.

Amy made dinner and we had a great time enjoying the professor's comfortable house. I wondered if I would ever live in a house again or if I would or if I would ever live in a house that was nice. Somehow I never forgot my penury and I was always conscious of it wherever I went. In the morning Amy said she would treat me to breakfast before I set out and we ate at this little diner in town that she knew. I expected this would be the last time I saw Amy for a while if ever and we played it cool, having had a casual sort of friendly relationship for a few weeks. Outside the diner we hugged and I set off

and then I was alone on the road again but with clean clothes and a full stomach.

At first I hesitated about my resolve to travel across country and I set out for Massachusetts or maybe to visit Whitfield but when I got there I changed my mind and didn't hang around. Instead, one night in the rain, I just started heading West and what followed was a 3-week blur of rides that I remember as a sort of list of highlights. After that first night it only took four days on the highway to reach Santa Cruz, California and the rides came one after the other. A sort of list of rides among countless ones stuck in my mind although they were long rides across three states or more and I remember dozing off in cars or trucks and accompanying strangers on all kinds of little errands. The first ride of my trip was the middle-aged man with a van who was just riding around in the rain in New Hampshire. He chain-smoked cigarettes the whole time I rode with him and had this bizarre story that I didn't know if I believed at the time but it's possible that he might not have believed my story either.

Mine was true although it might have been a little bold and I was a little self-conscious when I told it. He pulled over up on the highway at about 9PM and I was glad to get in and I was wearing an athletic shirt from Whitfield which I was carrying along with me in my pack. He asked me what I was doing out hitchhiking in New Hampshire at night and I explained that I had gone to Whitfield, which was well known there in New Hampshire, and I was just out hitchhiking around. I was going West I

guess I said and I had this idea I was like a character in a novel who quits private school and takes off on his own for a while.

It must have been mentioning Whitfield that got this guy started because as he smoked and drove in the dark he told a story of being related to a famous wealthy family, the Rothschilds I think, and just spending his time alone these days and that he couldn't read, which really stretched my imagination and I found it hard to believe. As we drove I suddenly felt sorry for this guy and offered to teach him to read if he wanted but he said no he didn't want that.

He drove West into the Massachusetts Turnpike and after a while asked me if I had eaten and when I said I hadn't he pulled over to a roadside restaurant and we stopped for a while. We sat in the smoking section and he was constantly lighting cigarettes and putting them out after only smoking half of them and in the smoky dim light of the restaurant I got an idea of how run down this old guy looked. He needed a shave and his fingers were yellow from smoking and I couldn't believe he was being so nice to me. After a while he left the restaurant and I was glad for a meal but I felt a little self-conscious about accepting gifts from a stranger.

We drove on West into the night, apparently because he just spent a lot of time driving around and he wanted to give me a ride, until we reached a rest area in Western Massachusetts. At the rest area he climbed into the back of the van where he slept until morning and I napped where I was sitting in the passenger seat.

In the morning I said I had to get going and he seemed reluctant to see me go but offered me some money, I didn't see how much, as a parting gift. I felt strange and offered to teach him to read again the way I had the night before but he said no and I said no, I couldn't take his money and he seemed puzzled but said all right. For the rest of my trip I felt strange about not accepting his gift but it was probably the right thing to do. He was a strange character and I never got his name.

The next ride I remember was much farther West and I got in at a tollbooth in Ohio or Indiana I think. I was following my map and sticking to major highways although it was often against the law to be hitchhiking rides on ramps or by tollbooths but people stopped anyway. This ride was one of the many with semi trucks and about dusk this one young fellow behind the wheel of an old semi motioned me to get in while he was stopped. I had never ridden in a semi on a rough concrete road before and this ride was an experience. In the cab of the truck you could feel every seam in the highway as every axle pounded over the concrete through Indiana and Illinois. The driver, who didn't give his name, was talkative and made dirty jokes about the pounding of the road and seemed to be glad for the company. It seemed like forever in the rattling old cab. When he turned North just past the Great Lakes I parted ways with him and took off on my own again.

After miles of cornfields in Iowa I got another big break in my initial trip across the country because an old man in a little pickup with a covered back pulled over. He was

making his way all the way back to California he said after visiting his daughter on the other side of the country. He asked if I had a driver's license and I said yes I did and then he let me drive through the night as we made our way across a couple of more states and I was amazed at how quickly I was crossing the country after setting out just a couple of days before. In the daytime we stopped and I climbed into the back where there was an air mattress to sleep on and I got some rest for a few hours. The man's name was Tom and he was a nice guy.

When we got to Nevada I found out why he had pulled over to save time and drive through the night. Apparently he was saving up extra time to stop in Reno and play poker before he got home to California and his vacation was over. In Reno he spent the day at the poker table and I cleaned myself up and wandered around the casino, eating in the restaurant and swaggering like I was some sort of renegade high roller. I remember feeling like I stuck out for being so young and seeing call girls and strippers casually hanging out.

Tom didn't say whether he won or lost at the table but I guess he lost because he didn't seem especially glad to be moving on when he climbed into the back and I drove us out of town on the last day of our journey to California. I remember we made it to San Francisco and then I traced out on the map the way to get back to the beach in Santa Cruz which was relatively nearby. Tom lived in some San Jose and he dropped me off at Los

Gatos at 4AM in the morning. I remember finding a park bench to wait on until a diner opened at six.

It was a short trip through the burned out hills to get to the strip at Santa Cruz. I remember how I fell asleep on the beach my first night there and overslept in the morning, getting a sunburn when the fog burnt off at 9 or 10AM. Getting across the country so quickly had made reaching the Pacific sort of anticlimactic, and I wondered to myself what I would do now with my money running low. By the end of the first day I found myself hanging out with a bunch of beach bums who were taking up a collection to go to the store and buy a beer--one 12 oz beer for the three of them. I didn't hang out long and I felt a little like Santa Cruz was already overcrowded with indigents and after another glamorous stay on the beach I decided I would head back East, this time taking the southern route across. Northern California was true to its reputation as I found myself getting rides fairly easily and one ride especially was very nice. A woman named Grace picked me up and soon after I got in like something out of a movie she asked me, "Do you get high Dave," and when I said, "okay," she smoked a thick marijuana cigarette with me before dropping me off. I didn't have to wander long because along came a pickup with an open back and the two guys in the front said I could ride there if I wanted. What came next was a spectacular ride and a clear sky at night across the Sierra Nevada mountain range, checking out the amazing scenery.

The ride went on for a couple of hours before I began to sober up and then I was left again out in the middle of nowhere somewhere on the California and Nevada border when a car came careening up, almost hitting me when they stopped. This time they were two guys in the car again, a little drunk with a cooler in the back and they said they were headed for Texas. I had been winding my way South from San Francisco for a while at that time and I realized I was in luck again. I gathered that this was a rental car and it was a little obscure what the two guys were doing in California but apparently they were almost out of gas money and had a deadline to meet at their destination. I rode along on edge for the rest of the night and then they asked me if I could drive when they got to the Arizona and New Mexico.

The road was straight and flat and I drove past the highway patrol car parked by the side of the road at 100 mph on a deserted stretch of highway but apparently they weren't too concerned. Speeding laws weren't really enforced out in the desert. Eventually when the two guys had had some sleep they started driving again and we ran low on gas. I was in the back when they pulled into a self-serve gas station, pumped the tank full at the pump, and then all in a hurry squealed the tires as they pulled away without paying. I worried that I was going to be an accomplice to petty larceny but out there in the middle of nowhere with the no other rides in sight I just held on for my life and prayed that we wouldn't get caught.

They dropped me off in the Panhandle of Texas and I was starting to look a little disheveled and it was more difficult to get rides. I hung around tollbooths and trucks tops and briefly encountered a young man who was the oddest person I met on my trip. He said he was from a monastery in Bavaria and was traveling around the Southwest for the Summer. He asked for food but I didn't know what to think. I didn't have any food so I just kept to myself and he wandered off to another exit.

After a while I got a ride in a semi with a driver who said he had a son about my age. He was headed Northeast and took me as far as Pennsylvania or so as I tried to make my way back towards the home I had left. I did my best to be getting rides at highway onramps and tollbooths but the rides just didn't come as fast in this part of the country. Slowly I made my way back up to New York State and it was there that my adventure ended. I was standing at a tollbooth when a highway patrol officer pulled up and said to get in. I showed my ID and got in and the trooper who was sort of distant said it was illegal to hitchhike at the tollbooth. He took me into the nearby city, which was Buffalo, New York and drove me to the airport where I guess he just expected me to find a way home.

I had stayed pretty much away from civilization during my trip so it was sort of a culture shock to be surrounded by busy people again. I didn't know what to do so I cleaned myself up and spent some change I still had on a phone call home. My mother answered who was surprised and relieved to hear from me, and you

could tell she had been worried. I sort of felt bad for the first time since I set out and asked if she would send me some money for a bus ticket. She said she didn't have any money but maybe she could use an emergency credit card to send me money for a bus ticket. I was there stuck at the airport and didn't know what else I could do if I couldn't hitchhike back so I was glad to have a solution and I found a Western Union office at the airport and waited for the money. Somehow I had a keen sense of how much trouble my impulses could get me into and I really wished I didn't have such adventurous desires. But even back then I felt like I couldn't say no to myself and I had to explore to be me.

The world seemed like a remarkably complicated place as I finally got the money later in the day and figured out how to navigate across town on the metro to the Greyhound station where I could leave town. As soon as I bought a bus ticket I used the leftover money to buy a burger at the Burger King in the station. When I was out on the highway, at the beach or in the desert, the people who were all around who were hurrying and sticking close to each other in all sorts of entangling relationships were different somehow than I was. It wasn't as though I didn't love my family but I had this urge to push myself independently that I couldn't refuse. Eventually after thinking about this on the long but comfortable bus ride home I concluded that I was just exhausted and when I finally got to my parents' house in Maine again I was blank-faced and stoic and just rode silently with them to get from the bus station

to the little home in the country where it seemed like I was no longer really at home.

My parents didn't yell at me or chastise me; they just seen relieved to see me again like somehow the magnitude of what I had done was bigger than ordinary trouble. In many ways it was, of course, and my father never mentioned the abandoned truck or the search for me. They just accepted me back home and tried to make it possible for me to start an independent life. I just ignored my guilt and stumbled on.

17.

Tricia

There were a dozen things on David Carmichael's mind that afternoon as he finished up at hacking away at his journal out at Allen Avenue. He was thinking about his journal, which had taken off over the last couple of months and he felt proud of himself that he was making progress there. Dredging up memories was oddly satisfying but difficult as he tried to remember back to more than 20 years before. As well he was thinking about the move to Danforth Street, which had been delayed a couple of times and now sometimes he wasn't sure it would happen at all. He felt relatively okay locked away in his room scribbling slowly at his journal and coming out from time to time to help with house chores. The thing that was most on his mind was getting some fresh air and setting out on his exercise walk that day. Each day after he wrote in his journal he changed

his clothes to some sweats he had gotten at the sports store and went for a walk on the walking trails that passed nearby to the house. Today he needed no extra motivation because he could see out the windows that it was a nice day and he was eager to start out.

As he pulled on his sneakers he could hear other people in the house, probably Mark and Joe, who were also filing down the stairs to leave. He hoped they weren't going the same way because he wanted to clear his head and often many of the other occupants in the house were distracting, especially from his writing, which required a lot of regularity and silence. Eventually he opened the door and went out, going down the stairs the others had just vacated and heading out the front door. He was immediately relieved to see that there was no one else to be seen outside except Digger, who was unobtrusive as usual where he sat smoking a cigarette. Digger was preoccupied and kind of out of it so he didn't say anything to him.

The path outside ran West across a couple of roads into a quiet neighborhood before he was in a deserted area of woods that lined an old path. There was a high school nearby about a half or three quarters mile along the path and sometimes he met students who went there seeking solitude in the woods. There was one couple of students, boyfriend and girlfriend apparently, who often passed the time after school hanging out at a deserted footbridge along the path. David felt like he was intruding on the days when he passed by them but

they made him remember his own awkward days seeking privacy with another young dislocated other.

Today there was no one else to be found however and it was especially pleasant to be out in the woods. It was a relief to be away from the house where he lived and to put down his journal for the day. The sounds, or rather the muffled silence, of the woods were soothing. He hiked along knowing where to avoid roots and rocks and emerging into an old field about midway along the path. As he got closer to the school there was an obstacle course built for the school through the woods and another footbridge at the bottom of a long hill leading up to the buildings of the school. It was about time for school to be let out so he stopped before heading out onto the school grounds and turned around and headed back in the direction he had come.

It wasn't long before he was nearing the house where he stayed and there was a big clearing behind some other houses in the neighborhood. In the clearing he could see Mark and Joe and Peter and another new figure down near the edge of the trees sitting in a circle apparently handing something around between them. David immediately guessed it was a marijuana pipe and they all seemed intent on their activity.

As he approached closer he could see that the newcomer was a young woman that he had not seen before. They all seemed to be getting along and the girl, who was difficult to see at the distance David was walking as he went along the path on the opposite side of the clearing, seemed somehow like a feminine

version of the Allen Ave residents with ill-fitting, non-descript hand-me-down clothes and a general air of being unoccupied and sort of indigent at most times. David noticed that she was intent on smoking the marijuana which somebody had acquired and seemed as experienced as the rest with it.

The group didn't look over at David as he walked by and he didn't wave or say hello to them. Except for Peter, whom he sort of looked after a little because of his creativity and familiar troubles, David didn't have much to do with the younger set in the house and he left them to their illicit pastimes, worrying a little for their wellbeing but generally not interfering and certainly not telling staff about their activities although staff probably had a fair idea that they didn't completely follow the rules when they weren't at the house.

David kept walking and when he emerged a little past the clearing into the street near the house Digger was still at the front keeping to himself. He said hello as he walked in this time. Digger suffered from some sort of mental illness and he often didn't spend much time with the others in the house.

"Hey how are you today," David said and Digger looked up lazily from where he was sitting. "Hi," he returned the greeting but didn't say anything else and David knew that this was all he really usually said. David kept going on past until he reached the front door and then he went into the house where nobody was around except Rory who was sitting in the office at the end of the house. David went into the kitchen and sat down at

the table wondering if the pot smokers would come back to the house. He wasn't especially hungry but he got up briefly and made an obligatory trip to the refrigerator. He had acquired the restless habit of looking in the refrigerator whenever he came into the kitchen like everyone else and he was surprised that the refrigerator door didn't wear out from so much use.

Everything was in its usual place both in the refrigerator and around the messy kitchen he observed and he could see that on the chore board on the wall that it was Peter's turn to straighten the kitchen. The dirty dishes had sat since breakfast and David doubted that Peter would perform his chore. It was like most of the occupants of the house weren't old enough to be sensitive to messes and they were going to get older without becoming conscientious about such things. David was loathe to step in and do anyone else's chores even when it seemed like it wouldn't be too much trouble. Somehow responsibility seemed like the most important thing to foster in the house and the way the younger set depended on the counselor's help was the big thing that he hoped would change. It was a cobbled together day-to-day existence though the general tenor of things was set by the younger set. As he sat idly at the table suddenly the front door opened and the four people he had seen in the nearby clearing came in.

They were all silent but apparently content as they filed past David and went into the TV room where they sat down on the couches in the room. Peter and the new girl occupied one couch and they immediately started

roughhousing once they were settled. "What are you doing, leave me alone, stop that!"

"I'm not doing anything to you," Peter replied, "you stop it!" The other people in the room vacantly ignored the two and reached for the TV remote control. Cartoons were chosen and where there had previously been silence and stillness David was acutely aware that there was now rambunctious activity and candy shoppe music and laugh tracks. He didn't know whether he wanted to stay downstairs or retreat into his room at first but he eventually opted for the former because he realized that he was a little tired of solitude for the day. Somehow he needed to be around other people a little and he sat quietly in the kitchen while Peter and the newcomer harassed each other playfully and the others watched cartoons.

After a while things settled down and things were unusually quiet except for the sound of the television. David wondered how the group really liked being intoxicated because it just seemed sort of dull and suppressed to him. He reflected that in his own experience it was kind of exotic and actually broke up the restless monotony of being young. He thought about Peter and his ambitions and sort of wondered if Peter still had plans for his future. He hadn't seen him with any news songs lately and he wondered if he was still composing them. There were so many distractions when a person was young he thought and it was somehow always an exception when a young person focused on accomplishing something with themselves.

Peter seemed like the sort of person who was exceptionally motivated and had a lot of life experience to draw on to write songs. Although it seemed unlikely that Peter would become a rich rap star it nevertheless seemed important that he do something he identified with considering all the imperfect impulses that had carried him away in the past.

Once the show was over Peter, Mark, Joe and the new girl came out to the kitchen and Joe looked in the refrigerator. He got out some hot dogs and went over to the microwave to cook them. Joe always ate the hot dogs in the house because no one else liked them.

"I'm hungry," the girl said taking a seat at the table across from David. She was clearly not a very shy person and the next thing she did was introduce herself to David, who continued to sit quietly, only reacting minimally to the group. "I'm Tricia, what's your name," she asked David.

David replied, "Nice to meet you Tricia. I'm David. What are you doing today?"

At this Tricia and Peter began giggling wildly and didn't say anything so David went on to Tricia, "There's probably some French fries in the freezer but somebody has to cook them."

"Oh great," Peter put in and opened up the freezer door. Next he got out a sheet pan and put it on top of the stove where the oven control was. Then he poured out the whole bag of fries and put them into the oven.

Tricia giggled some more and Mark said stridently, "I want some of those."

Mark was never really reserved or diplomatic and it didn't really seem to occur to him that he and Joe were third and fourth wheels to Peter and Tricia, but this soon explained itself.

"When will Julie be back from her meeting with her parole officer," Joe asked, grinning inappropriately with his mouth full of hot dog.

"She gets back tonight," Tricia replied, apparently because she knew Julie. Joe continued grinning and eating hot dogs and David decided he would try to figure out how everyone knew each other.

"So how do you know everyone Tricia," he asked.

"They live at Washington Avenue, " Joe interrupted, "Tricia just moved to Washington Avenue and I met her when I was going to visit Julie. She was just sort of hanging out."

"So you all came back here and everything," David asked as an open question to everyone.

"Yeah I wasn't doing anything so I came along." Then she and Peter giggled uproariously while Mark and Joe watched in a sort of empty contentment.

"Are you a rapper too, Tricia, " David asked.

"No, people who like music and think they are going to get famous are suckers," Tricia replied. "I don't let anyone play music around me."

At this Peter looked blank and seemed a little uncharacteristically intimidated. He didn't say anything.

"You don't play music do you," Tricia asked David. "Where did you go? I saw you walking on the path."

David was surprised by the question because he didn't think he had been seen but he did his best to answer. "Oh I was just out for an exercise walk. I walked down the path to the high school. It's a nice walk.

"Exercise walk? Why would anyone go walking if they didn't have to get somewhere? You must be old. How old are you?"

"I'm 40," David replied feeling awkward at her inquisitiveness. She had a way of being awkward that David's modest social skills didn't handle that well. "I'm not that old but I sort of feel old I guess," he went on.

"40 is old," Tricia said, "I hope I live until I'm 40. I don't think I will. You have to be boring to live that long. I hate being bored. I'm going to do a job and make it big. I don't care if I live really."

"Yeah we're going to do a job together," Peter put in and started giggling again.

David gave them the benefit of the doubt and didn't stop to speculate about what was meant by "do a job " but he was immediately on guard and uncomfortable with the two. He wondered if Rory could hear them down the hall. "I'm like a rapper without the music," Tricia explained, "I don't need any music to express what I do."

"That's interesting," David said as Tricia went from talking idly to hitting Joe in the shoulder as hard as she could. Joe winced but didn't wrestle back like Peter did. Peter didn't seem to notice. Joe was finished eating his hot dogs by now but the French fries were still in the oven.

"I'm hungry," Tricia announced again making it clear that she was accustomed to getting what she wanted. "I get the munchies when I smoke pot," she continued and the others didn't register any alarm over the mention of illegal drugs in the house. David worried that Rory might overhear and think that he was hanging out with them. David was pretty easy going for the most part but he wasn't like the others, who sort of didn't seem to be worried about getting into trouble. That is, everybody except Peter, who looked a little uneasy but loyal to Tricia, whom he had just met.

"It sure would be nice to get the kitchen cleaned up," David tried to hint as there was an awkward silence waiting for the French fries. Trisha filled the void with a comment, "They assigned me chores at the house but I'm no bitch. You won't catch me cleaning up after other people." By this time David was forming a clear impression of Tricia and as much as he wanted to remain neutral with his housemates he definitely felt that she was a bad influence. The other fellows had enough problems of their own without a stranger leading them off a cliff faster. He wondered if there was anything he could do. His remark about cleaning the kitchen was pretty extreme. Somehow being older

seemed to give him perspective but didn't solve all the problems that these guys came up with. If you asked him it was all the unfiltered influences of industrial society that kept distracting young people. It was overwhelming and they were far from having the social skills to avoid pitfalls.

It seemed like social skills like abstinence were hard to learn in an environment of deprivation. The more you didn't have, the more you were promiscuous in your attempts at self-satisfaction. David knew from his own experiences that it was difficult to stay out of trouble if you were restless and bored. The best thing, he thought, was to have creature comforts that kept you sticking close to what provided them for you. Otherwise you were always restless to try anything new that came along, he thought.

Soon the French fries were cooked and Peter distributed them on a motley collection of mismatched dishes that he found in the cupboard. Although they had cooked the whole bag there weren't many fries to go around and Peter left out Joe because he had already eaten hot dogs and was back in the other room watching cartoons again. Mark ate his in silence and then wandered off alone upstairs leaving behind his empty dish on the table. Peter and Tricia sat next to each other with the ketchup between them and ate hungrily. When they were almost done eating Joe came in from the TV room and exclaimed, "Hey you didn't save anything for me." To this Tricia replied, "You had hot dogs, pig." Tricia was

clearly given to rude bullying and Joe was the current target of her ire.

At this Joe stood down suddenly because from where he was standing you could see down the hall to the end of the house where the office was. In a moment Roy appeared looking friendly but stern in the way he usually did. "What are you guys doing out here," he asked. "Someone should clean up the kitchen don't you think," he went on and then turned to Tricia, "Whose guest are you? What's your name?"

There was a policy that guests had to check in with the counselor at the office and Peter and Tricia and Joe all looked up with blank faces as if they hadn't heard of the policy. After a moment Peter said, "She's with me. Her name is Tricia and she is from the girls' house at Washington Avenue. She's new to Welcome House."

Rory replied, "Okay just so she knows she has to sign in when she visits. So what are you guys doing? Who's turn is it to clean the kitchen? Peter isn't it your chore?"

To this Peter looked caught between feeling humiliated in front of Tricia and chagrined that he was being reprimanded by Rory, whom we considered his friend, but after a while he said, "Okay, I'll do it," and began undertaking to collect the pans and dishes from around the room. Then he cleared the sink and ran water to wash them. There was a dishwasher but it was full of old dishes that he didn't empty so he couldn't use that. After a few sullen moments the sink was full and he

began washing dishes and stacking them on the rack at the counter next to the sink. Rory didn't hang around to watch and Tricia made a lewd gesture at his back as he went back down the hall.

David didn't hang around either and he left the rest of them in the kitchen and went back upstairs to his room. Suddenly it had been a long day and he had to remind himself that he got a lot done in his journal earlier so it wasn't a total loss. David took a lot of care with his journal and it made him feel like he was doing constructive things with this time. He hadn't really completed anything yet, no stories or a book, so he didn't show it to anyone but he was proud of his progress.

He sat down on his bed and observed out the window that the shadows were lengthening, although not very much, because the days had gotten longer as Spring passed. He slept, or tried to sleep, a lot at the house because his medication made him sleepy and sleeping refreshed him. It wasn't long before he slipped into his usual daydreaming and the late afternoon passed excruciatingly slowly. He thought about his journal and times in the past when he didn't have a roof over his head.

There was so much difference he thought between his experience and that of Peter Sanchez but somehow they overlapped and this was hard to believe. When you thought about it the scale of the problem of the world was one of the most significant things he had experienced in his life. It still awed him a little to think

how many people made their way about their daily lives in the 3,000 miles between Maine and Santa Cruz, California but somehow that always failed in contrast to circumstances where the things he did with himself didn't matter to others, at least not enough to directly merit a salary.

It was like Peter's problems, who was significantly younger and hadn't yet tried to go to college to bring together a supportive world around himself. A little humble music was all there was between him and being adrift in the world, or worse, in prison again. Somehow those experiences had to be worth something and David thought about the people along the way who had been no help to him, and trying to grow social skills as a person until he could make art to express himself. Peter readily took to expressing himself, at least without the influence of others like Tricia, who demonstrated how fragile Peter's expression was when you realized they had just met.

What would happen to them? Tricia herself had difficulties but David worried more about Peter, whom he had gotten to know some and whose creativity he identified with. He knew from experience that it took resolve and diligence to protect and nurture one's creativity in a chaotic and demanding world. He thought to himself that Peter, as a young person, should be writing songs all the time and this was the only way he would get recognized by staff for doing what he did. People could be a little sympathetic, but he would have to put his heart in it.

After a while David got ready and went to bed early. He went to bed before anyone else in the house and before the evening counselor came on downstairs. It was meditative or something and it had become an important part of his routine. Lying on his bed and hoping to go to sleep he couldn't help but think more about his situation. When it came down to it he felt that, if anything, his situation required patience. It was a sort of just deal with it kind of situation because his life had just disintegrated the last time he went to the hospital. He was in touch with his parents a little bit but he had lost a lot of his possessions and a lot of his situation just wasn't there anymore. He really didn't know if he had the energy to set up another place to live. The only thing for it was patience he thought and he wondered if he still had any luck. It seemed like he would need some good luck to end up in a healthy, safe living situation again.

Eventually he drifted off and slept pretty deeply for the first part of the night like he always did, but about 2AM he was awoken again and he realized it was Peter and somebody else yelling in the hallway. David would never get used to the way his other house mates stayed up all night and kept no schedules.

"I'll beat you! Don't you talk that way," he heard a voice say and realized it was Peter's.

Then he heard another voice which he realized was Joe, "Tricia and Julie are coming over tomorrow and they want to smoke pot. Give me some money so I can get some." All David could hear were the two voices and he

tried to imagine where they were in the hallway from the sound. It sounded like they were in Joe's doorway at the other end of the house.

"You said you would get some yesterday! Tricia and Julie won't want to come if there is nothing to do. They're bored over at Washington Avenue and don't want to just hang out.

Joe replied that he couldn't get pot if he didn't have any money and there was silence for a minute. They were aware that you couldn't really hear them downstairs at the other end of the house where the night counselor was but they lowered their voices a little when they resumed. David could still hear them and they were keeping him awake.

You have money Joe. I'm the one who doesn't have enough income since I left off work. You never work Joe. You are always bumming cigarettes and stuff. We have it pretty good for now but people keep trying to change our situations like they don't want us to live here forever."

"Maybe Tricia and Julie have some money," Joe speculated. "Tricia just got out of jail like Julie and you have to have an income to live here. They probably set her up with something because she's homeless.

David laid on his bed and listened. He was getting pretty acquainted with the different support systems that there were for people in trouble. As far as he knew everything depended on Social Security, a federal program for people without income with disabilities. It

seemed to him that it wasn't good that money got used for troublesome things like drugs but when he tried to pull back and get some perspective he realized that the big reason people were searching for something to do is that they received only a little money for support and it was injected into very irregular lives.

David thought to himself that what situations like Peter and Joe's needed was more structure. It seemed like the only structure that people provided was employment structure and that was remarkably focused on making only specific demands on people who insisted on being left alone. To David it seemed like Joe was chronically and constantly exposed to "partying." Peter was more isolated in ways that seemed to make his situation less complex.

Peter was constantly trying to structure his own time and sometimes David wondered if that was something he had learned in juvenile detention.

Programs like that were harsh and should be replaced with community-connected programs like the one he was living in. It always seemed like things could be better.

Humans were strange like that. They were fickle about their likes and dislikes and when it came to big things like romance they acted sort of unpredictably. It seemed to David that it was obvious that people should be supported in such a way that meeting members of the opposite sex wasn't a sort of accident of fate that

had to be promptly exploited but rather a sort of everyday occurrence people could take for granted.

18.

### Postcard From Paris

#### Journal

Whitfield was the place I always returned to when I was 18. After I took the bus home to my parents, who were ominously quiet after my running away stunt I was a little subdued and humbled also but my fundamental wanderlust was not satisfied and I quickly returned to my old habits while I was living at home with my parents. In particular I kept on hanging out with Jerry Green, who still had plenty of time and his own brand of charisma to get into trouble with. Jerry was full of questions and mildly awed that I had taken off, preserving my new renegade status and in a way keeping up with Jerry's rogue example after a long year that began with Tim Robbin's tragic end the Summer before. I acted out outlandish exploits trying to live up to the larger-than-life examples I had encountered at

Whitfield and brought home to Maine but somehow all I accomplished was getting deeper into trouble which I could not afford to get out of. My weariness and caution preserved me but the modest diligence I was capable of and raised to perform never materialized in those years. I rode around with Jerry in his parents' car and drank beer and was sort of gently delinquent in a way I couldn't really afford for myself.

I was Jerry's sidekick during the times when his girlfriend was working or otherwise occupied and he had time to fill up with his guy friends. Jerry's girlfriend, Jamie, was home from college for the Summer and once in awhile she would hang out with the guys when Jerry and she didn't have a place to go to have sex and they were just affable and bored. As usual except for special circumstances like with Amy, I didn't have a girlfriend to hang out with and I was sort of a welcome third wheel. Once, I got to talking and the subject of my lack of a girlfriend came up.

"Aren't there any girls you know," Jamie asked from the front seat of Jerry's parents' station wagon.

"No not really. Or well it's not so much that I don't know any girls as that I don't know any in a romantic way. Somehow it just never works out that way. There's this one girl I know from Whitfield who sent me a postcard from Paris though."

"Oh really! Where does she live? You have to go and see this girl, I bet she likes you," Jerry said from the driver's seat.

"Well her name is Catherine and I know her from Latin class back at Whitfield. Technically she's a year behind me but we were in the same year in Latin. She was always pretty nice. She's kind of quiet. It was a while ago that she got sent me the card."

"What was she doing in Paris," Jamie asked. Jamie was pretty sophisticated and she was sort of slumming in going out with Jerry who was sort of an outlaw. Jerry always said she went out with him because Jamie's mother hated him and I could see where that would be true.

"Catherine was doing school year abroad at Whitfield and when the school year was over in the countryside she went to stay for a few weeks in Paris before coming back to the US," I replied, envious just to recite my friend's accomplishments. There were a lot of things to envy about my classmates at Whitfield but it was things like this, traveling in romantic places, that got me the most. "She's very nice and stylish enough. Once when we were in class together we went on a field trip to go to a Latin oratorio at the college near Whitfield. Catherine knew the Latin teacher and his wife the school librarian very well because she hung out on campus a lot during Summers with her mother's boyfriend who was the school minister. Mr. Mackworth was his name, everybody called him Mr. Mack. I actually didn't know her all that well except for that time going to the Latin oratorio but it didn't seem to matter all that much. It seemed like she was kind of interested in another boy from our class whose name was David too-

- the Latin teacher called us "Primus" and "Secundus"-- but I never knew them too well. It was a complete surprise when I got her postcard in the mail."

"Oh you should definitely go to see her," Jamie said, "do you have enough gas to get to New Hampshire, Jerry?" At this Jerry exclaimed, "Sure, we could do that," and took the next turn along his previously aimless route to start off in the direction of Whitfield. I wasn't doing anything but smoking cigarettes and hanging out so I thought great, what the heck. Whitfield was about an hour away and we listened to Jerry's tape collection on the way. He was a big fan of Steely Dan and Yes and prided himself on his taste in music. More than most people I knew, he a musician, a drummer, and was known around in Maine for being in a band that played at school once in awhile. They were pretty successful for a teenage band and they had won a local won a local contest for youth bands early in high school.

Jerry knew the way to Whitfield for the most part because he went to college nearby and he had just finished up his first year there. He had the same restless way of returning to school grounds from time to time even though it was some distance to get there. I don't know what it was about places but somehow young people left to themselves will gravitate back to their old haunts.

We drove for about an hour on the back roads from Maine down to Whitfield and when we were getting close Jerry asked me for directions because he didn't know the rest of the way. I knew the way passing

through the area well because I had traveled the route dozens of times and even hitchhiked along it which always made remembering a route seem more familiar. I remembered a lot of landmarks and felt like I was in a well-known place although in many ways I was some distance from home and had yet to realize the ways that I didn't fit into Whitfield and its surrounding area. Once we got to the town proper of Whitfield with the gazebo in the center of the square I began to get excited.

"I think Reverend Mackworth lives on Front Street over by the church. I've been to the church before to visit Ms. Phillips but I'm not sure exactly. We'll have to find a place to park and walk over. As we drove through campus I pointed out the school buildings and the library like they were my second home, with little sense of the pragmatic and mercenary dimension of the patronage of young people in education. It wasn't that I doubted the sincerity of the warmth of adults involved in education, but it was at that time glaringly true that I had little sense of how strangely different it felt to be involved in education in some other role than that of a student. Jerry parked the car and I noticed too that there was a strange, alien sense that Jerry and Jamie felt not being a part of the student body at Whitfield. We walked down Front Street towards the church. The residence of Mr. Mackworth was just beyond the church in one of the dormitories of the school and I wasn't very used to the place. When we reached the small yard on the street I stopped and said, "This is it I think. Catherine lives here with Mr Mack for the

summer I guess. Do you think I should knock on the door?"

Both Jerry and Jamie, who were on their best behavior because of the strange and impressive surroundings, said yes definitely and I went up to the screen door at the front of the house and knocked. I wasn't really prepared for what happened next. The person who answered the door was waif-thin and dark-haired and dark-eyed and looked pale and sickly. I didn't really know at the time how much this was due to Catherine's new sense of Parisian style.

"David," Catherine said in her frail voice, "What are you doing here?"

"I got your postcard a few weeks ago and these guys said I should come and visit. This is my friend Jerry and this is his girlfriend Jamie. They are both from Maine where I live and Jerry goes to the University of New Hampshire nearby and Jamie goes to Eastern College in Massachusetts. How are you?"

"Oh I was just taking a nap. There's so little to do here at Whitfield. I've been back now from France for two weeks and I've got a little cold. Come in!"

At this we all went into the apartment which took up the first floor of an old Victorian house and went into the front room which was simply furnished with a small grand piano in the corner and a gold couch nearby for listening. I was on my best behavior in Catherine's elegant surroundings and we all sat and tried to make awkward conversation. Apparently Catherine was alone

and glad to have the company. " I was just doing some reading and trying to rest with my cold." It was as though I had never quit school without graduating the year before and Catherine hadn't been away for a year.

In the way that 17 and 18-year-olds have we were fast friends again and Jerry and Jamie politely watched from a distance as Catherine and I got over our shyness and got to know each other.

"I took Latin in France, " Catherine explained and apologized for slipping into French for time to time. She seemed like she was very lonely hanging out in the deserted campus of Whitfield for the Summer and my heart went out to her in an 18-year-old boy's way. I felt like a clumsy brute next to her elegant manners but this only made me like her more. It seems somehow that it didn't matter what we talked about we were just glad for each other's company and I know I was eager for any change from my parents' grim household.

I just felt adventurous and rogue-like which at that time in my life was what I wanted since I felt like I was finished with school forever which was sort of in contrast to Catherine and Jamie and Jerry who all had college plans and didn't see themselves as making it on their own without education. I was enthralled when Catherine talked about the bookstores in Paris and introduced us to her kitten which she said she had smuggled over on the airplane in her backpack. Her kitten's name was "Mick" and he was a little black Paris cat. In a naive 18-year-old way I identified completely with Catherine and somehow we instantly became

close friends. It seemed like the afternoon quickly passed and after a while Jerry and Jamie said they had to drive back to Maine. There was no question for Catherine and I about my leaving. Without saying anything it somehow seemed agreed between the two young women that I would stay and they got up to go. As they got up Jerry asked one more time, "Are you sure you want to stay? So you're staying eh?"

As I watched them walk back onto the campus to get back to their car I felt the same sort of reckless abandonment that I had felt when I had taken off hitchhiking a couple of months before and somehow to me the irresponsibility of disappearing again from my parents' house only made me feel more excited. During those days I was always eager to break bonds with home and I was lucky that there were people in my life who could catch me as I sort of wandered off a personal cliff.

When Jerry and Jamie were gone Catherine and I were left alone in the house and Catherine made a joke about doing it on all the furniture but I was shy and we went out on the back porch of the apartment where there were chairs and a nice shady place to sit. There was even an ashtray because Mr. Mack smoked his pipe out there from time to time and I smoked a cigarette while we sat. Catherine smoked a little too and I was immensely impressed with the way Catherine didn't have to hide her vices from the adults in her life and I felt this was a very new experience in my life. Soon, as the afternoon waned into evening Mr Mack came home

and I was relieved that he welcomed me to his and Catherine's home and that he was very much the busy, congenial man that I remembered from Whitfield. I was sort of on alert waiting to be scolded or chastised for hanging around but I was graciously treated as Catherine's guest and I even started calling Mr Mack "Isaiah," which was his first name, in the same way that Catherine did. When Isaiah got home Catherine and I went on a walk on the paths out by the river at Whitfield. We walked around in the Dusk and sort of began our natural courtship passing the time and entertaining each other until it was night.

That night Catherine and I shared her room at the back of Isaiah's apartment and I couldn't get over the way that Isaiah was apparently so permissive. To me it was an entirely new experience of adult influence and I envied the way that Catherine was treated by Isaiah. In the morning Catherine's mother Celia was there and I was a little surprised that she also didn't object to Catherine letting me stay as a guest. Celia and Isaiah were apparently involved and it was strangely like we were two couples staying in the apartment for the weekend.

But one thing that Isaiah did ask was whether or not my parents knew where I was and he insisted that I call them in the morning to let them know that I was okay. The sort of growing pains that I was experiencing and putting my parents through were much alleviated by Isaiah's influence. I will always remember how much

the earnest busyness of Isaiah's household impressed me.

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As he finished writing that day 20 years later his parents weren't really on his mind. He put down his notebook and sat in his room in the afternoon quiet. There was so much that had taken place since those days around Whitfield. No longer did he have the community support network that Whitfield faculty had generously provided in place of parents back in those days and it seemed like the responsibilities that he had experienced in the years after Whitfield were endless.

He decided to go for his exercise walk right away and he put on his sweatsuit and went outside. There while he was stretching Joe was watching and was puzzled about what he was doing.

"What are you doing," he asked and David told him he was stretching out for a walk. "Oh," he said, "are you an athlete?"

Joe's questions caught him a little off-guard because it never occurred to him that everyone else around him didn't necessarily have experience playing sports in school. He might as well have been the quarterback of the school football team it was so exotic to Joe to exercise and he wondered how someone who thought that way took care of themselves. It was so different than David remembered the things that he tried to do

as a young man and the welcoming reception he got in those younger days. Joe was alone and not smoking today and David left him to himself sitting in Digger's chair outside the house in the yard. Out on the trail David passed by the field where Joe and Mark and the new girls Tricia and Julie had been hanging out and he was relieved to see that the rest of them and Peter were not out today. It was a sort of gray overcast day of the sort that bordered on almost rainy when everybody would be looking for something to do with himself.

To David, the moist fresh air felt refreshing and he tried to make a brisk pace, which was a little more exhilarating. He walked out past the field where Joe and Peter smoked and then passed the church down the street and onto the path into the woods. The path followed the stretch along the street for a while before entering the woods and he checked out how the yards in the houses on the street changed from season to season. At this time of the year people mowed their lawns which looked so manicured next to the overgrown grass near the woods of the trailhead. Once in the woods he encountered the young couple who loitered on the trail and stopped to clear his throat so he wouldn't interrupt them where they sat in each other's arms on the footbridge along the trail. They looked up from their courtship and quickly pulled back their arms to themselves and composed their faces. They were so transparently fond of each other that it reminded me of my own youth.

Further along the trail David picked his way past every rock and root along the road and felt relieved to be out walking. He started to warm up and perspire a little the further along he got and the trail passed another field and another bridge before he got to the nearby school which lay along the path. Although it was a little after the time school let out for the day the yard and parking lot around the school were deserted already. The tall pine trees around the school had yet to shed needles and the school greenhouse could be seen off to the left where it was full of green growing projects.

He promptly turned at the edge of the woods again and repeated his quiet passage back. It was always remarkable how the cathedral-like silence of the path belied how close the neighborhoods and their roads and cars were nearby.

Back at the house he found himself thinking about the routine of the house. He decided to wander down to the office at the end of the house and talk to Rory. Once in the house it was silent again and he thought some more about the routine of the house. Almost everyone who lived there was being treated for something and had appointments on a regular basis with the doctor or nurse practitioner. The house counselors dispensed everyone's medication and tried to promote people's programs. Bode had back problems and was apparently in some sort of trouble with the law. Digger had mental health problems and was working on his daily living skills. Drew had mental health issues and smoked heavily. Daily living skills seemed a little challenging for

Drew also. He could only keep track of so many housemates at once but he tried to be considerate of all the problems of the household. He was glad from time to time to catch up with the counselors, who earnestly took pains to help the house. He thought Rory was especially helpful although he couldn't especially relate to him entirely. Rory was an outdoorsman who drove a pickup to work everyday. He had a gun rack in his truck and was a confirmed bachelor. What David admired about him was the way he was so affable and helpful to the housemates and he was a good cook. He always seemed pleased to dine on whatever he caught out hunting. David thought that it was difficult to do that.

David liked to eat regularly processed and purchased foods and Rory was more flexible. David went and ambled down the hall to talk to him. David wasn't doing anything very focused except a little journaling and he didn't think this talk would be a distraction. Talking to Rory was always like two hunters meeting in the woods. He was always a sort of good Samaritan and had a friendly greeting in store. The one thing about Rory was that he was awkward about the doctor.

Rory was there in the office sitting in front of the computer screen. He didn't seem to be watching anything and the big cabinet where they kept the housemates' medicine was in the corner by the window. David said, "Hi," and tried to compose himself to chat. Rory looked up alertly and wheeled his office chair back a little. Then he noticed Albert was there also in the corner of the small office and he felt a little more

agitated to see that he had come in to talk with both of the counselors but was glad to see Rory. His sort of uncharacteristic visit was underway as he tried to think of something to say to Rory and wondered why he had come to the office.

"I will need a ride to the doctor's office on Thursday," he said because it always made him a little anxious too and he wanted to be sure the counselors would remember to take him. Sometimes the counselors lost track of appointments and he had to remind them. For himself he tried very hard to remember appointments and he often found himself sitting in his room thinking about them.

"Oh, okay," apparently remembering now that David had reminded him. "Maybe Albert can take you but don't worry somebody will be here to drive. With that Rory seemed to have said everything he had to say and took in stride the mention of the doctor and seemed unperturbed that he wasn't thinking of David's appointment. But Albert chimed in and said a few things too. Albert was also the social worker for the little village that surrounded the Allen Avenue Welcome House. The house sat on a side street where they were about a dozen row houses that were a little ways further along the road scattered beneath some small trees. Albert had a joke to tell. "Did you hear about the snowman that got upset when the sun came out? He had a total meltdown," Albert said and laughed. Rory laughed obligingly and David tried to remember the last joke that Albert told which was something that ended

with a little chicken. Albert usually had a joke or a song or any number of small skills to share which were generally welcome but David wished he himself could think of a doctor joke because Rory would feel that more. It was a puzzle that felt as difficult as picking a winning lottery number to fit together something appropriate.

"How are things going with the doctor," Albert asked in a friendly way and David stumbled a little to think of something to say. David visited a nurse practitioner monthly to review his medications and once a year he went to see the physician.

"Good," he said shortly. The last advice he had received was to take care with his diet. "I'm taking care of my diet," he said.

"You do a good job with the kitchen," Rory and Albert sort of said together and David decided he should go. Albert had convened a frank meeting about keeping the bathrooms clean when he had first moved into the house and David too wished his housemates would take a little more care with the bathrooms but he hesitated to be admonitory about it. It was all in today's work he guessed.

He went from the office to the kitchen where he found Peter and Tricia sitting at the table. He said, "Hi" and they looked up sort of bored and interested in anything or anyone that came along. David tried to oblige them at first by asking, "How are things going," but they didn't really respond.

Then they said together, "What are you doing," and he tried to come up with something to say.

"I just went for a walk and I was working on my journal earlier. It's going well," he said.

"What's your journal about," Peter asked. "Oh it's about trying to remember some things about when I went to high school."

"I use my recordings to remember my songs," said Peter, "I've recorded over 200 songs."

"Can you sing any of them by heart," David asked.

"No, not really. I'm going to make a tape and sell them intown," Peter said.

"That will be a challenge," David said. "Have you ever performed live?"

"No I don't really have any equipment," Peter said. Then Tricia added, "I went to a rap show once and I hated it. The singer yelled at the audience and it made me sick to watch him dancing. He was a bad dancer. His rap was more like heavy metal music. It made me forget the lyrics and the crowd sucked. They were all jumping around and slam dancing."

After this David wandered into the next room and sat down on the couch by the TV, which was off. This room was a little quieter and he could hear Peter and Tricia giggling about something. He looked out the window and saw Digger out in the yard smoking, and then David

just sort of sat stunned on the couch for 15 minutes. Luckily the time passed quietly and he thought about his journal a little and his walk in the woods past the young lovers on the bridge. He thought about how they sat entwined like two young serpents or kittens in a pile and something about him didn't envy anyone the way he would have if he had seen them when he was younger. All the curious anxiety and awkwardness of unfamiliar intimacy back when he was young enough to find sexual behavior adventurous came back to him and he smiled wryly. It must be like that for Peter and Tricia in the next room probably.

He felt to himself that Peter and Tricia were just getting to know each other and he wondered really where their relationship would go since neither of them was in a situation to be independent. He wondered what they thought about things like cohabitation and marriage. Himself, he had never really thought about marriage because it seemed like bonds that were made legal would be stifling somehow. Peter and Tricia were probably just looking for time alone a lot and it was hard to imagine that Tricia was completely naive about the hazards and responsibilities of parenthood or couplehood. Eventually he decided to get up and wander back into the kitchen for a moment on the way as he passed to the upstairs. It was unavoidable on the way to the upstairs.

Tricia and Peter were still sitting at the table but he was shocked and concerned to see what came next. As they sat facing each other he could see Tricia moving her

tongue inside her closed mouth and then her jaw dropped open gingerly and her tongue stuck out with a smirk. He was astonished at what was on her tongue. There lying flat on her tongue so the edge didn't cut into her was a real razor blade against the redness of her tongue. She extended her tongue within with the blade lying on it and then retracted it in such a way that she could close her lips without cutting herself. Next he saw her cheeks expand and her tongue move to the side of her mouth. Next time it returned to the center of her teeth and her mouth opened again, this time revealing no blade lying on her tongue. The blade had become completely hidden apparently between her cheek and teeth, however close to cutting the cheek it would apparently be.

He couldn't watch for long and he remembered himself and kept going carefully around the corner and up the stairs. It defied belief that the girl had done this but he was sure that he had seen it with his own eyes. He couldn't bear to watch or think about it further as he went into his room and sat down on his bed to end the day.

The Piano Or The Hi-Fi

Journal

Catherine and I slept in a pile with Mick the Paris cat she had smuggled in her carry-on on the airplane home. It was like we were instantly joined at the hip from the time I showed up with Jerry and Jamie and I forgot about them quickly as Catherine introduced me to life on her fold-out couch in the back room of Isaiah's campus apartment.

It was a small room, 10 by 15 ft square, and the couch took up much of the space when pulled out. I was 18 and I thought I was fulfilling my lifelong dreams there attached to Catherine Isaiah's seemingly deserted house although I had nothing with me except a dwindling pack of cigarettes and tall, slim body which didn't feel skinny and young to me anymore now that I

was with Catherine and her Paris chic. Somehow we slept as though drunk and I realized that Catherine had a cough that was the only thing out of place among the scattered clothing and books of her room.

I was wearing a pair of cloth boating shoes and khaki shorts and a rowing shirt left over from the team I had quit the previous fall and it really didn't matter to me that I had nothing else to wear when I thought about how I was back on campus at Whitfield. I felt tanned and healthy despite having lost nearly 30 pounds on my cross country trek the month before. I don't think we had remembered to eat the night before either and nothing else seemed to matter except our attention to each other. The first morning we ventured out together and I was a little stunned in a modest way when we entered the hall and the door was open to Isaiah's bedroom where Catherine's mother, Dr. Le Penn, and Isaiah were sitting on the in bed in their night clothes drinking coffee. Isaiah smiled a big generous grin at my modesty and a little I thought because he was self-conscious about his non-celibacy. Catherine and I didn't stop on our way to the kitchen where we made tea because Catherine liked to drink tea in the morning and we were trying to wake up in our new surroundings. At least they were new to me while what was new to Catherine was having a guest. We were both used to boarding school and our own forms of travel so padding around in the morning among virtual strangers had a distant familiarity to it.

We were hungry after the tea was hot since we had skipped eating the night before and we made toast with marmalade and I was amazed that even breakfast could be elegant and anglophile. The apartment had a big dining room and a small sitting room at the front where we had sat and talked to Jerry and Jamie the day before. Somehow I was so used to hitchhiking that it didn't occur to me to wonder if they had made it home all right or think that it was unusual to be in an entirely new environment from day to day.

The morning, which was a Saturday, unfolded slowly and I eventually came to understand that this was a day off for Dr Le Penn and Isaiah as well. Dr Le Penn lived a couple of hours away and did medical research during the week. She was a small, dark-haired, dark-eyed woman like Catherine and she kept a small lap dog with her at all times. I didn't know what to say to her and Catherine's familiarity with her seemed awkward. Soon everyone was dressed and for one day of the week Isaiah wasn't wearing a jacket which seemed to set the tone as much more relaxed. Catherine and I, or at least me, sort of hid out in her room and didn't participate in the early routine of the household, and I was so stimulated by my new surroundings that I just sort of sat slumped on the bed. It was the first time that I had experienced co-ed familiarity at Whitfield and I made no connection with life at my family's home. All was quiet and orderly and I wondered if anything was getting done. I was a guest of course, something I barely remembered and having spent the night with Catherine I took my cues from her. After awhile Catherine came

back into her bedroom and sat down next to me quietly and petted the cat. She seemed like a different person since she got up that morning and saw her mother but I had nothing to compare her to and thinking back to Latin class didn't seem to make anything add up. I didn't yet have a habit of smoking first thing in the morning so I felt like I had nothing to do now that I was dressed and had eaten. I had no bedroom manners yet and this was the first season that I had been sexually active. Catherine on the other hand, seemed more experienced although she was younger than me, and she was emphatically going through the motions of treating me as a special guest and I was flattered. The last thing I wanted was to not fit in.

"Come out and meet my mother," she said.

At her invitation I stood up and followed her into the front sitting room at the end of the hall where there was a sturdy old couch and a small grand piano squeezed in next to it. The room was nearly filled by the piano and the couch and nobody else was there. I looked at the piano with longing to play because I could play the piano a little and liked to try to show off sophomorically. In the bare room with a wood floor and no carpet the piano looked clearly out of place but there was not a great deal of dust on it. No books of music were present anywhere in the room, no simple flowers or decorations, but somehow the room didn't seem to need anything else.

The piano stood like an enormous portable monument to elegant care and represented for me the exact the sort of life that I considered Catherine to live. Enormous, expensive and difficult to move yet taken along as an indispensable ornament, it had sturdy but spindly dark legs and a row of yellow ivory keys. It didn't occur to me to estimate the piano's age but it was likely a hundred years old. I also didn't speculate about its provenance or ownership and its solid brown burgundy finish prickled with fascination for me. What I did wonder was whether or not Catherine played. Catherine was so accomplished and piano playing so commonplace that I guessed that she played a little but found that I was wrong eventually when it was mentioned by Catherine that she didn't play and she had inherited the piano from her grandmother.

To have such an enormous, shapely, solid possession enthralled my imagination and I thought the empty music rack was somehow more comely although it startled my imagination which always imagined my piano at home as having music spread out to play when I wandered in and out of the piano room hammering out the handful of tunes that I knew. The familiar but distant white and black keys of Catherine's instrument sat mutely wondering if there would be an oil painting or some other object in its designated room to complement it.

Sitting on the old gold-colored couch and gazing at the piano while Catherine left to go into the kitchen or some unknown place left me upright and alert as Dr Le Penn

came into the room without saying anything. She was already pre-rumpled and casual in her linen suit that morning and her dark eyes only reminded me of Catherine much later after I had contemplated those of Catherine in a photograph she gave me. Celia, as Catherine called her, came and sat down on the couch and I instantly wilted on the soft couch not knowing how I should compose myself around this august personage.

"Hello," Celia said tentatively and I stumbled to return the greeting, feeling as though I was strangely assembling a montage of reactions and manners to meet this new type of person. She was my new girlfriend's mother, and this was one category, and she was a doctor, and this is another category, and she was an adult on the Whitfield campus, which was another category and on top of that she was someone I had recently seen in her bed clothes. My mind was exhausted after four categories and I decided to keep my silence.

"How did you sleep," Celia went on and I answered automatically.

"Fine thank you."

"So Catherine says you have been traveling around and you were in her Latin class," Dr Le Penn tried again, absorbing my awkwardness with her eyes.

"Yes, we were in Latin together, before she did her year abroad. I left school early last year."

"Catherine tells me you were on the crew team."

"Yes."

Celia was clearly used to being brief and her next question didn't register with me. "So what are your intentions," she asked, and I sat silently not thinking of anything to say. It sounded to me like a question that was asked of potential suitors but there was nothing on my mind about marriage so I remained silent and puzzled, not even really self-conscious about my lack of an answer. It seemed somehow like a rhetorical question and I was relieved and glad when Dr Le Penn turned away and I felt dismissed somehow and tolerated as one of the Catherine's playmates. I got up quickly and went down the hallway to see Catherine. It felt vaguely rude to have such a short interview with Celia but I was at a complete loss to have anything to say and I had the humiliating excuse of being a child.

Behind me I heard Isaiah quietly in his office next to the kitchen and I wondered what the day had in store. Catherine was still petting the cat and she looked up and said, "how did it go," also rhetorically it seemed because she seemed to have the same awkward distance from her mother even though through a veneer of familiarity. Catherine sort of sulked in her sophisticated but childlike way and it wasn't long before I realized that my interview with Celia was to be the day's brief perigee. We were left to each other and our own devices in a way that seemed miraculous to me. Somehow I had a feeling like absurd homework or tasks would be assigned at the last minute and the serene leisure of the

weekend household would be broken, but instead the morning went on without interruption.

There was one chore assigned and that was to make dinner for everyone and it seemed a small enough task. As I sat on the back porch smoking the last of my cigarettes I felt the oddness of being at Whitfield In Summer with Catherine. Somehow I was slow to reconcile something that Catherine seemed to have completely internalized. There was a whole world of familiar faculty as independent, unsolicitous human beings I realized and the world didn't revolve around me and my performance. Catherine came and sat down next to me on the back porch crowded with outdoor furniture. The pine trees of campus however filled the backyard like extra independent columns of the porch and out there in nature I felt a sort of sense of being a little more at home in contrast to the elegant interior world of Celia and Isaiah.

"I need to get more cigarettes," I said to Catherine, who didn't smoke when she was here at Isaiah's.

"You think," Catherine asked in the way she had of almost slipping into French that Summer. "We can get some when we go to the store for dinner. We have to cook dinner this afternoon. Is there anything you would like to have? We can just poach everything in wine. That's how I learned to cook in France."

"Anything is okay with me," I said, thinking how exotic poaching sounded. After that Catherine was silent and I put out my cigarette on an ashtray that was near my

chair. Somehow I didn't have a lot to talk about despite my recent adventures because they seemed sort of sordid next to Catherine's exploits and I was her guest so I tried to indulge her enthusiasm for Paris. She referred everything to the "trendys" and told me about visiting the bookstore, "Shakespeare and Company," which floored me with envy and I thought her life couldn't have been more exotic compared to mine.

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When David finished journaling that afternoon he sat and dreamed a little about his past and remembered those remarkable days 20 years before when it seemed to him that his life was something out of a book. He wondered what it must seem like to someone else at that age whose taste in books was radically different. Somehow to David movies didn't have quite the same imaginative content as books and he wondered how Peter Sanchez's experience fit together to animate his imagination. Somehow it seemed to him like Tricia was an edgy adventure that inspired a very risky imaginative life.

In many ways David had climbed mountains and traversed thousands of miles to find the realms of his imagination but Peter seemed to be exploring much more interior and confined spaces. David didn't doubt that Peter's eyewitness experiences might stick with him if he survived them but to David the freedom of the

open road was much more captivating. Tricia's brazen tricks and her strident attitude were places David didn't want to go and he thought Peter was being led astray even if David's own "live and let live" attitude counseled against giving unwanted advice and trying to dissuade Peter's folly. David thought about how reverie was so much more inviting when it wasn't loud or focused on taboo topics like crime and punishment. People made art out of their experiences and David concluded that some experiences were more extreme than others. He marveled at how unimpressed by danger Peter often was and how oblivious to the razor blade Tricia could conceal with her tongue he was. Somehow it seemed to David that admonition was completely improper to consider in Peter's case although somehow he might benefit from a voice of conscience, even if it probably wouldn't change his behavior.

People thought in groups it seemed and what one person neglected another bright bring attention to, he thought. David thought about how the counselors at Welcome House patiently tried to influence Peter to safer and less risky habits. At every turn Peter was confronted by advice to conform and try to fit into society effectively. It was such a mystery why and how some people internalized this advice and seemed to struggle mostly with themselves to find a path in the world that made them happy while others, like Peter, found themselves externalizing the conflict of advice and impulses and came into clashes with the people in the world around them. Tricia was like one big clever trick that she tried to share with Peter and it seemed to

David so desperate and wild to attempt to trick the world into allowing viable passage. It was natural in many ways but David didn't envy it. The world was tricky about tricks he thought to himself. There were clevernesses that the world tolerated and incorporated into daily life like music and literature and on the other hand there were tricks of which the world was deeply suspicious and even attempted to control.

Tricia's tricks seemed to try to express freedom of thought and action in

personal ways that expressed exclusion from the conformity of a classroom or workplace. It was like she was determined to struggle to express herself in a way that made you fear for her. It made David think of life in a primitive tribe where a deception or device would make an individual's personal renown better. It seemed like industrial society was determined to homogenize and assimilate thinking like this and was reluctant to make it fit into society.

As David sat and thought he wondered if Tricia would be around today or the house would be quiet. He resolved to go downstairs and see what was up. At first it was quiet in the house downstairs and David could hear his own footsteps as he went down the stairs and into the kitchen. There was no activity at the end of the hall in the office and the kitchen was empty. David didn't look in the refrigerator compulsively this time. He decided to just sit down at the kitchen table and deal with his idleness.

Letting his mind wander at the table he looked at the chore board and could see into the TV room from where he was positioned in the kitchen. Somehow that was the one big thing at Allen Avenue. You could find something to do but it was difficult to reward yourself afterwards and keep going persistently at a sustained task. He wondered when the move to Danforth Street might happen and if it would be more comfortable there. After a while he heard loud music coming from upstairs and he prepared himself to shift gears and protect himself from the piercing sound. It made him cringe and stiffen and the sustained chaos of the house began to get to him.

The sound stopped abruptly however and before much time had passed David was surprised to hear Peter on the stairs and then see him enter into the kitchen carrying a large stereo speaker in his arms. Peter used the kitchen table as a workbench because he didn't have a table in his room and he set the large wooden cabinet on the table with a soft thud.

He laid the speaker face up on the table and began prying around the edges of the cloth speaker grille. Peter was intent upon his task and didn't say anything or look up at David where he sat at the end of the table. The speaker box was large, about two and a half feet tall and one and a half feet wide and it was sort of old. In an age of iPods and earbuds it looked like an antique Hi-Fi speaker that had seen better days. Peter was oblivious to the sense that it was obsolete. A length of arcane speaker wire trailed from the back of the speaker which

Peter gathered up and set aside on top of the table. Inside the grille the outer workings of the speaker were exposed. David could see the large base speaker at one end of the box and another smaller circle which was positioned in the center of the box beneath the horn-like opening that topped them all off. David knew little about the technical details of how a Hi-Fi speaker worked so he empathized with Peter's curiosity. Peter stared at the silent circular shapes in the box for a moment as if he had x-ray vision and could memorize their inner workings. Then he hoisted up the wooden box and turned it over to expose the flat, brown particle board of the back where the wire had terminals to connect to the inside. The particle board back presented the first substantial challenge to Peter's curiosity.

The back was evidently attached without fasteners which baffled Peter for a moment until he noticed that the edge of the speaker box was grooved and the back slid neatly into the case from the bottom. The curious young man realized that the terminals protruded out of the back from somewhere within and he could slide out the back as a fairly simple obstacle to getting inside the workings. It was only a short time before he could see the backs of the speaker units within.

At this point he stopped and marveled at the simplicity of the inside of the box. The conical backs of the noise makers were suspended behind a central piece of particle board which had holes cut through it to fit around them. Without vocabulary the mechanisms

were objects that only drew in the inquirers curiosity the more. There were wires connecting to the noise makers but there was little clue to the mystery of how they sounded aloud. Peter was silent as he poked and pried and tried to discover what could be dismantled next. In his final analysis he got a screwdriver from the kitchen drawer and unscrewed the noise makers from the central panel that had holes cut to fit them. It seemed as though in this session the only thing that Peter wished to achieve was removing the round devices from cabinet and curiously examining them. As Peter unscrewed them and took them out and set them aside David thought to ask, "They are interesting, huh?"

To this Peter sort of mumbled back, "I took apart a computer once."

Then David said, "You should get a soldering iron, then you can remove the wires without cutting them."

"Oh," Peter replied, still intent on the units he had removed from the box.

"Do you find that your music is better loud," David asked.

"No I can only play it on my phone. It doesn't go very loud," he said.

"Do you ever focus on the performance, without sound equipment--acoustic so to speak?" "No that's not rap."

"Sure it is, you can say the words out loud to an audience. You can make sound effects with your body. I met a drummer once who was always tapping on everything around him, with no sticks or anything."  
"You don't like my music," Peter said suspiciously.

"If you don't focus on something essential about it you might get distracted in minor details like sound equipment. What is rap music anyway? Why do they call it rap?"

"I don't know, it just is. I like it."

"Isn't it talking music, like talking about your rap sheet or talking trying to make a sale. It takes practice. Talking about a criminal record with the cops is difficult.

At this Peter set aside his speaker parts and picked up some mail that was lying on the kitchen table. He opened a letter that was addressed to him and frowned emphatically.

"This minister from corrections keeps sending me letters asking for money! All he wants is money. Look it says to put some money in this envelope and send it back to him. I don't have any money to send him. That's not very religious."

David thought to himself that it seemed a little cynical for a prison minister to keep asking for money but somehow it was a central thing and it must have been necessary for the pastor to sustain his ministry. Peter put aside the letter like one of the speaker parts and sat

down at the table. It was eerily silent after the curious session taking apart the speaker and neither Peter nor David wished to speak. In the silence Peter slumped as if the marionette strings that kept him alerted and animated were no longer there. You could hear the nondescript hum of the refrigerator.

After a while Peter's phone went off where it was sitting amid the speaker parts on the table and Peter routinely answered it.

"Hello," he said with a questioning inflection and put the phone up to his ear. David couldn't hear who was on the line.

"Yuh," Peter said drawn into attentiveness and suddenly sitting up in his chair, not so alert that he was about to stand but definitely more poised than he was before. "Just working on a speaker," Peter said for his half of the conversation. "Oh it's working all right. I took it apart."

David shifted in his chair listening to Peter. It was as though the unheard speaker were there in the room and everything was different now.

"Oh that's bad," Peter said, "well I'm not busy I'm just hanging out. Are you sure you are going to have to go to work?" Peter ventured his inquiry a little credulously, not really believing what he was hearing. David stiffened some more thinking about how his own work was going in his journal and suddenly a little worried about being drawn into unwanted activity. "Yeah, I guess music is work. I'm just playing around," Peter said into the phone. "Okay I'll see you in a few minutes, bye."

Peter touched the phone screen briefly and then put the phone down again. He didn't say anything but he looked a little apprehensive and David guessed that Tricia was coming over.

### Was The Weather In Paris Very Cool?

In the meantime waiting for Tricia David sat in the kitchen with Peter and his dismembered speaker. Peter got up restlessly and opened the refrigerator. He looked intently into the mundane ice box and didn't seem to be really thinking about food but instead just sort of meditating about it. David knew that he himself was not hungry but was still sort of curious about the disassembled speaker. Since Tricia's phone call Peter had seemed tuned into a separate world where he was focused on things that might be described as including his identity somewhat or at least things that involved his ambitions and sense of purpose.

It was strange today to observe the way Peter seemed to live in multiple worlds. There were times when he seemed remarkably absent and he slumped and didn't react very much to events around him or others

speaking. This was especially true when there were other house residents around or he was talking about his prison experiences. Lockup made him slump defeatedly and curiously revealed him to be sort of tired and relaxed instead of stiffened or weary. You could imagine Peter being slack jawed and indifferent even when he was being arrested and David remembered that he had been sort of in between showing concern and being sprawled out like a rag doll when he went to the hospital a couple of months before.

David had become an astute observer of psychology in his days in psychiatric hospitals and Peter always puzzled him. Peter didn't seem incapable of alert presence but it was notable how the only thing that aroused this in him was rap music. Peter was finally finished with the refrigerator eventually and as he sat down again at the table he said out loud, "Tricia's getting a ride over from her parole officer."

To David this was an all-consuming announcement. First there was Tricia, who was a handful and always transformed the house when she was present. Then there was the news that she was riding with her parole officer. David wondered how Tricia reacted to the level of control that was associated with a parole officer. To David this would be this would have been a totally alerting if not impossibly difficult type of encounter. He wondered how Tricia, who was always trying to make her own escape it seemed, would handle that kind of discretion. Peter seemed unperturbed.

They didn't have to wait long because Tricia soon arrived. Today she seemed to carry herself with a unique focus. Her feathered earrings and face jewelry were the same but today they seemed to have receded from her presence and no longer be parts of her nervous focus as they often seemed. Tricia wasn't focused on her personal ornamentation today. Instead she seemed to have absorbed a little of the down-to-earth grounding that her parole officer probably helped to impart. However she quickly lost this when she came into the house and into the kitchen where Peter waited expectantly.

Peter immediately got up when she came in.

"Have you got any pot," Tricia said, and Peter immediately went upstairs to find Joe. David noticed Tricia's usual complete indifference to the presence of the counselors down the hall and hoped for her sake that they hadn't heard. David resisted the impulse to give in to the sympathetic magic of the absent parole officer and downgrade Tricia to a complete basket case who would require long rehabilitation to reorder her life. David's own experience with drugs made him think of them as ephemeral influences that were often as easily dropped as they were picked up given the nature of the intervening distraction. Tricia seemed somehow as blithe to their influence also.

Peter returned quickly with Joe and all three immediately went out the door to some place outside where they apparently meant to smoke pot. David worried a little for them but he was learning to let them

pursue their own fate. After a few minutes of silence in which he reflected on the sudden change of events, David got up and went down the hall to visit Rory.

If Rory had overheard Tricia's inquiry he didn't show it where he sat in front of the computer screen in the office. Rory and Albert spent a lot of time at the house sitting at the computer screen because although they were always available to the residents, the residents didn't always go to them with their problems. It was a sort of interface that the house was meant to work on a lot. It was like a mysterious exchange where the social skills and the responsibility and the diligence of the counselors were supposed to be passed on to the residents and their numerous problems with those things.

David thought to himself that it wasn't really a mystery when you observed how much effect that familiar attention had on some people, and then he said to Rory in greeting, "Same old, same old, eh?"

Rory smiled his usual big grin and replied, "Oh yes I guess so. Did you get your meds this morning," and David replied that he had.

"How do your meds affect you," he went on to ask.

David paused a moment to think then explained that they made him a little drowsy, a little sedated he thought and that sort of kept him out of trouble perhaps. He could hear the others coming back into the house in the distance and he didn't want to get

into a long conversation with Rory so he said, "Well see you."

Peter and Tricia were arguing about a rap performance and Tricia was giggling and saying that it was better when the singer ran around while Peter sort of looked puzzled and said the singer could do what they wanted.

"But that's it," Tricia said, "When you sing like that you look like you're getting electrocuted."

"No you don't," Peter rejoined. "It's dignified to move around when you sing," he continued.

"No when you talk like that you snap and twitch like a lobster if a lobster could talk."

"That's not true, listen to my new song, " He held up the phone and in a moment you could hear his mumbling, soft voice come through the rhythm track that played behind it.

Had a dream, didn't know what to say

Girl was big, she decided I was going out to play, .

Who was she, talking down to me,

Making me her bitch, was she some kind of witch

I don't know what to say, she tried to run the show

But she didn't leave me low. I didn't know

If I was another girl, she was telling me

All the things to be, and here I was  
Trying to stand up to the buzz and jump around  
And get around to make ends meet  
Like everything's got a place but I don't know it  
Girl was big, like a chief she got teeth  
And me I'm trying to make my way  
Don't know if it's work or play, she just talks  
And everybody walks somehow I don't know  
But I but I don't know it yet, who she going to get?

The song sort of dragged on in a rhythmic, mumbling sort of way and David listened with curiosity. Joe and Tricia listened restlessly and Tricia immediately asked, "What are you going to call it," when the recording was finished.

"Girl Boss," Peter said.

"Who's it about" Tricia went on.

"It's about you," Peter explained.

"What do you mean it's about me," Tricia exclaimed, "I'm not big."

"Yeah but you have a big personality," Peter said. "You're bossy and it makes me feel like your bitch," he mumbled.

"Ha," Tricia blurted out and then there was a long silence where Joe kind of sat dazed on the couch and

Peter was tongue-tied while Tricia kind of sort of sat stiffly and hugged herself. David felt a little removed from the situation and wondered when he would make an excuse to go back upstairs. David got tired of the tedious highs and lows of youthful socializing easily and he wondered if Peter was going to collect his speaker in a box or if he would find the parts still covering the kitchen table tomorrow morning.

As they all sat silent David was called away when Albert came through the front door in his usual leisurely way. He looked around the TV room and said to David, "Hi I've got some good news for you David if you want to come down to the office with me." Albert was usually quite considerate about privacy and it occurred to him that there might be news about Danforth Street. He followed Albert down the hall.

Once they were in the office with Rory who was sitting back at the computer again Albert explained that Danforth Street had an open room that he could move into right away. They could go tomorrow morning so he should go get packed. Danforth Street should be a more comfortable place for him to live Albert said because there the other residents were closer to his age and more settled. David was glad too and he thanked Rory and Albert for everything that they had done for him while he was at Allen Avenue. He would miss Rory's good cooking he said, then he went back down the hallway and passed the room where everyone was also still silent and he headed back upstairs to figure out what he would do about packing.

The only things that were really significant were his bed clothes and some winter gear that he had acquired while he was at Riverview and he sat out on the bed and thought about how he would carry it. He realized he had no boxes or suitcase and that he was nearly as indigent as he had been as a teenager. He was resigned to his fate though and it occurred to him that the few belongings he had would fit in a couple of trash bags from the kitchen.

He had a more practical kit back when he traveled across the country, with the poetry anthology and the bedroll, it occurred to him to think. It was at times like these that he fleetingly realized that he lived as transient an existence as he ever had and somehow it didn't shake his self-confidence in the way that it used to. A mobile phone, a box of papers, these were the most prominent things that he had and it all seemed to him that his life had been like this ever since boarding school. He wondered if Peter's experience was similar in jail. Somehow that explained the curiously inappropriate sense of nostalgia for it that Peter sometimes displayed. David shuddered to think how adaptable humans were.

But as he grew older David was aware of the pressing urgency of habits and routines and he went downstairs to see if he could find a couple of trash bags to put his belongings in. "Where are you going," Peter asked from the TV room when David went by for the second time in a short while.

"I'm moving out, Albert says I can move into Danforth Street tomorrow so I'm packing my things."

"Oh wow, did you get a room there? Do you not like it here?"

"No this place is ok but I'll be able to live downtown. I'll fit in better there I think. Good luck with your rap music Peter. I'll miss you guys."

"Oh yeah thanks, take care," Peter replied distractedly but sincerely and David got some bags from the kitchen drawer and carried them back upstairs where he began sorting his things.



At the Happy House of Catherine and Isaiah and Celia, Catherine and I spent the afternoon gathering together the ingredients for dinner and we walked across campus to the deli in the middle of town that sold specialty foods to the affluent inhabitants of Whitfield. To me it was like wandering around in a nature preserve or national park. There seemed to be just enough going on to support commerce and Celia gave Catherine plenty of allowance so that we weren't digging around in our pockets to pay for our purchases. To me it seemed enchanted not to worry about where your next ride or meal was coming from and I tried to keep Catherine company as best I could.

I wondered often what Catherine thought of me wandering around but to her I seemed to sort of fit in even if I didn't look or act like a Paris trendy. Time seemed to pass imperceptibly and before long we were cooking dinner in the apartment kitchen and Catherine was taking charge in her quiet way. We set the table in the big dining room and Celia opened the wine to "Let it breathe." Isaiah's household didn't drink expensive ostentatious wine but a practice of serving wine with dinner was preserved sort of like having wine at communion. I had never had wine at dinner before except at my aunt's wedding years before where the wine had gotten nervously spilled on a carpet by the clumsy wedding party.

At dinner I felt somehow awkwardly at home although I had never dined with such sociability and simplicity before. To me somehow the experience of dining with my peers at Whitfield and my adolescent drinking exploits were a sort of dual apprenticeship that made me feel as if neither experience was totally new. I had long relied on being quiet and unobtrusive to get by and this was no different.

Catherine and I set the dinner on the table carefully then took our seats and joined the adults and paid attention as they ate and made small conversation. It seemed as though Catherine had not shared a lot of her recent experience abroad in an adolescent way and Celia tried in vain to elicit some of them.

"Was the weather in Paris very cool," Celia condescended to ask.

"Oh it was nice. It rained," Catherine offered.

"Are you looking for a job this summer," Celia asked me and the mention of scullery drudgery made me anxious. At this, Isaiah saw my discomfort and interjected that he had received his vocation after college when he joined the peace corps. He explained that in the Peace Corps there was a lot of distressed people and difficulties and he decided that he really wanted to get involved and help out. He told the story in such a way that it seemed ironic that he was in the Peace Corps but something formal and less hands-on like being a clergyman was actually more involved to him. I puzzled over this but it wasn't until I was older that I realized esoteric activity could be a contribution.

Isaiah was so candid and engaged that I wondered if a vocation really meant a talent for something but it seemed plausible that if a person wanted it enough a vocation could just be a calling to do something you really wanted to do. I wondered too, how Isaiah dealt with so much good fortune. In my experience good fortune involved a lot of distracting excitement that could keep a person from carrying on their duties if something came up.

I was used to my sullen family's perpetual complaining and this, their sort of commonplace gravitas, seemed unanswerable for me who grew up rendering attention to it. My family I think sometimes tried to be positive but they were always tired from manual labor so perhaps this was more difficult than in some other situation. It never occurred to me back then that being

positive in itself could be considered a worthwhile labor. Isaiah must have had his times when he didn't feel very optimistic but he didn't show it.

"I have just been traveling around. I'd like to go lots of places," I said. "I'd like to go to Europe maybe."

"Don't wait," Celia put in, "when you get older you lose your Eurail pass." To me this seemed impossibly exotic but anything might happen I thought and tucked this information away for future reference. Apparently there was a discount for young travelers in Europe like the discount on tuition my family got at Whitfield but I knew I wouldn't find out specifics unless I eventually went there for real.

Dinner ended as peacefully as it began and the night passed uneventfully. Catherine and I loaded the dishwasher and served dessert and people were relaxed but alert and functional. It must have seemed like a chore for Celia and Isaiah to eat formally with Catherine and me but they didn't show it. Before we went to bed Catherine told me we were going to church in the morning and I felt a little apprehension again, wondering what church would be like with Isaiah and Celia but I felt assured that it would be more dignified than it had been when I went to church as a boy.

In the morning we got up early and we went out to the kitchen for tea. Isaiah was there and he showed me a box of hand-me-down clothes that I could choose from so I would have clothes for church. Isaiah was somewhat tall and had once been thin so the bright

colored clothes sort of fit me. I was elated because I had long admired the clothes of Whitfield faculty members who often wore preppy clothes like Brooks Brothers which looked so crisp and expensive next to my mundane choices. I chose a bright red pair of golf pants with paisley designs on them and the yellow shirt with a collar which I wore long afterwards as my favorite shirt left over from my Whitfield days. The effect was as outlandish as the silk pajamas of Krishna Deerfield back in MacMillan hall or Phineas with his best tie for a belt in a Separate Peace and only a Whitfielder or some Harvard undergraduate would have thought I was going to church. Eventually we drove into Boston in Celia's plain car and parked someplace away from downtown to avoid the crowds and we took a cab to the cathedral.

I felt remarkably dressed up and perfectly elegant as I accompanied Catherine. Isaiah was wearing his clerical collar and he seemed somehow more dignified and animated than usual and I tried to observe carefully but I was a little too distracted by my new clothes to be fully present. Soon we were sitting in the church. I had never been to "High Church" before and I was amazed at how elaborate an assembly ritual could be. Everything was scripted and affected and one day I would reflect on how dramatic and structured a meeting could be. It was all the more grotesque when compared to the austere surroundings and simplicity of the small town evangelical church I had grown up in at home. The officiant ascended an elevated pulpit above the people and you realized that every detail of the service and church had a careful history. We sat and stood, listened

and spoke, all with one unanimous voice that deferred abjectly to individual speakers from time to time.

Eventually we shared ritual food and there was some relief from the colloquialism of the assembly. The contrast between the fundamentally adult gestures of church and my sophomoric clothing didn't really distract me that much. In a teenage way I was having a sort of eschatological experience with affect and socialization. It was like I had little sense of limitation on my self-presentation but everyone around me was observing conservative conventions. A casual observer might have called my sartorial abandon rebellious but to me I guess I was just trying to find out how I fit in in a way that was externalized but with freedom to express myself. My own parents would agree to send me to Winfield but never would have dreamed of tolerating such outlandishness in church.

The conversation turned to where to have lunch. Celia suggested Chinatown and everyone is agreeable so we went there. Everyone else has knew a restaurant that they had been to before and I felt a little clumsy like an unsophisticated tag along guest. Once out in Boston I felt unsophisticated as if my clothes were a little ill-chosen and I vaguely wish I fit in better but I don't really know how I would have made myself fit in. I felt sort of like a girl and I was somewhat shameless about my appearance which was a notable contrast to Catherine who was dressed conservatively and left behind her Paris trendy clothes for the day. I was the only one dressed loudly and self-indulgently as we went to the

restaurant by way of Boston Commons and passed nakedly through the natural park.

At the restaurant it was busy and we waited with the exotic plants in the entryway for a few minutes before being seated in a busy dining room. Catherine was a little rigid as we sat and waited for the server and I wondered if she was a little embarrassed by me. But I doubted it because I knew her better than that. It was more likely that she was in one of her Paris moods and she was getting down to the bare bones of socializing, which I thought she was good at but sometimes she seemed frustrated by. When the server came it was decided that we would have Dim Sum and for me and my impoverished manners I was just thrilled to be able to pick out anything I wanted.

I thought what a luxury it would be to always pick out whatever delicacies you wanted to eat but somehow that sense was blunted by the awareness of Catherine's unease. I took my cues from her and tried to be hesitant as Celia sort of carried the conversation. She sort of talked about Boston and Boston places like Chinatown and I was a little awed by her knowledge of the city. Around Catherine and her mother I felt a little caught out not knowing whom to please.

Dinner didn't take very long it seemed but after a couple of courses of the Dim Sum cart I had a sense of how quickly the bill could run up and that if I dressed like that forever I would never be able to manage financially. Isaiah was generous and forthcoming and I was again sort of amazed at being initiated into the private life the

man behind the collar. It seemed his duties were never very onerous but they never really stopped and there were always expectations to live up to.

Long after when I met other clergy people I could empathize with their unique predicament and it seemed to me that one could summarize the history of religion across cultures from it. What do people do when leisure and convenience are accomplished but a more personal and affected approach to others is inspired? The answer seemed to be that like someone separating themselves from a chorus of dancers, a lone person begins to speak aloud separately and those around them begin to join in.

## New Beginnings

Albert had dropped off David and his three black trash bags of belongings at Danforth Street earlier in the day. David was in his new room where there was another twin bed, an old inelegant dresser and a beat up metal cabinet in the corner for a closet. He was on the second floor again and the cold gray room looked out over a parking lot in downtown Portland. He felt uprooted and alone as he sat down on the bare mattress and swung his legs up over the edge to sit upright with his back against the wall.

There was no other furniture in the room so he felt he had little choice if he wished to sit alone on his own in his room, which he did, and he adjusted sort of uncomfortably. The old bamboo blinds that didn't match anything in the room served to block the gray light from the windows and the room was dim except

for the yellow light of a ceiling fixture that David would learn to keep turned off whenever possible.

He let the newness of his situation wash over him and soaked himself in the tepid disappointment of moving from one nondescript flop house room to another. It was like there was a sort of residual hope that had built up about moving and his hidden expectation was that his life would be greatly changed in a new place. His sense of place filled him with possibility but the same bare mattress and gray walls of the room brought him concretely down to a sense of dislocated alienation in his new room. He didn't know what to think about, but he was alert to any sounds that might come from the silent house around him and wondered if there was anyone else around.

For an hour he felt like that and heard no one else in the house so he eventually felt calm and centered enough to get up and twist open the closed top of one of the trash bags from which he withdrew the inexpensive polyester sheets that he brought with him from Allen Avenue. He also found a new package of insect-blocking mattress covers over on the decrepit stained dresser next to the wall. For a few strenuous minutes he wrestled the mattress and box spring off the bed and covered them in the stiff paper-like sheets of the covers then made up his bed and sat down again on top of it. His bedding was the only welcoming possession he had and he rubbed the plain soft blanket with his hand to see how it felt in the new place.

That night he slept fitfully among the sounds of the new street and the active nightclub down the street from his window. In the morning he got up about mid-morning and got dressed from his trash bags and went downstairs to the new kitchen which was a long, open room at the back of the house with a line of cupboards along the wall and bordered with a sink and a the stove along the other side. It looked serviceable and David decided he would go to the grocery store and get himself some food. To David at his age, the simple living skill of eating regularly was something he pursued diligently every day. He knew he couldn't function, or write, without paying attention to this first and he got his coat and the key left out on the table for him and went out into the street where he was familiar with how to get around because he had lived in downtown Portland off and on for most of his adult life. The streets changed little. At the store he bought bacon and eggs and hamburger and buns to carry back to the house. It took about an hour all together and it was nearly noon before he was back at the house and stowing his supplies in a new refrigerator that was full of people's food in the house and when he had found a frying pan and cooked some eggs and ham Alicia came out of the office.

"You can have cupboard number 4 to put your food in okay," she asked and reached one at the end which she opened for him. Alicia was welcoming and nice but he felt the curious weight of oversight which he realized was not going to go away in this new situation. When

he finished eating he washed his dishes and put them away where he had found them.

Feeling better now that he had eaten he sort of wandered and looked around by the dining room table and the door to the office. It seemed like he would rather be alone somehow as he went into the TV room where two people were sitting watching the noontime news. David scrambled to remember their names but the woman, who was about 60 and sat on one of the couches with a pile of magazines, spoke first.

"I'm Victoria," she said, "Hi, did you move in?"

David replied that yes he had moved in.

"Do you like it here," she asked in a friendly way, apparently a very talkative and gregarious person.

Sitting down on an empty chair David felt obliged to introduce himself and tell his story. Telling his story was something he was used to avoiding but it was a curious skill he had sort of clumsily acquired during his years as a client of social services. It was always a little stressful because to share of himself meant sort of putting himself into a little bit of jeopardy as to why he was mentally ill and indigent and he always wondered if people would think he was weird or violent. And then there was the way if people thought he was stable how would they respect his choices in occupying himself and not urgently expect him to do wage work beyond group chores.

He kept his story kind of brief but didn't want to keep his new peers guessing about him so he tried to list the important points. He had never been married; he went to prep school and college--this was a big source of anxiety in his story because it never made it feel very at home in the world, especially if the people he was talking to might not have had similar experiences. There was always the sense that privileges like that brought social obligations, obligations that people often met with financial resources he didn't have and class was a taboo subject in America. Americans willfully believed that there were no classes in America and resisted any suggestion of such empty distinctions. David tried not to mention exclusive schools or special acquaintances. He kept his travels largely to himself. He was glad that people didn't react jealously when he suggested that he was a writer and thought maybe he would be able to get by in this new house. No one really reciprocally shared an occupation which they practiced.

David also didn't share a specific mental health diagnosis and when the other man, Jerry, shared his name he had a distant recollection of his recent stay at Riverview. Jerry had been there in the ward where he stayed and hadn't seemed very content, so David reserved a sort of special treatment for him.

After David had briefly shared a little sense of himself Victoria generously told about her experiences and it was interesting and somehow relieving to find out that she had been married twice and had a daughter and granddaughter who visited her from time to time.

Victoria was forthcoming in an unguarded sort of way that made David feel like she wasn't very discontented with her life at Danforth Street where she said she had lived for the past 8 years. She complained about social services however and he got a sense of how tenuous, even after 8 years, living at Welcome House remained. Victoria had been homeless and worked in factories when she was living with her second husband. To David what mattered was the way she had found some respite from her problems at Welcome House but things were still not entirely secure.

To David a lack of security seemed attributable to the larger randomness of industrial society and it occurred to him that Victoria's gregariousness was a gift that she used well to embed herself at Welcome House. Victoria talked and gave of herself in a way that few did who were presented with the spartan efficiency of the factory she described herself working at. There were light bulb manufacturers and electrical suppliers in the area of Southern Maine and she decided she had become unwelcome at some of the places she worked by talking too much. It was like the way she connected herself to her family and friends was alienating in a barren, corporate workplace.

"I got fired from Dynalite," she prattled on, naturally and gracefully taking up all the attention in the room. She went on to describe her husband and a murky picture began to emerge of a woman who always talked about almost everything that came up who was surrounded by people who hesitated and stuttered to

talk confidently. There was a sort of tragic quality to her gregariousness and it made David think of how destabilizing garrulousness would be if it didn't confine itself to abject servitude.

Jealousy was the thing that David thought about as he as she talked. People weren't naturally all the same, there was a diversity and some people didn't line up readily to ratify workaday life even if they spontaneously fit in with it. Victoria both made things in her surroundings copacetic and was the constant source of interruption and distraction that many others seemed to wish would go away. David was fascinated by her story of how she came into contact with social services. She had become divorced and had no place to live so she was at a shelter for 2 years. David imagined how difficult that must have been but realized that there was an element of aging gracefully to her story. It was like as people got to know her better they were more and more resistant to her social skills until finding herself she realized that she didn't fit in. Victoria was a clear case of how the social safety net could work for everyone, or perhaps almost everyone. She was a tragedy of jealousy and the dynamics that she especially experienced were known to everyone in mass culture. Strangers came into contact and began to get to know each other in the surface way that industrial society fostered, and they reacted to each other in ways that inevitably had sibling rivalries among strangers with no bonds to constrain their close interaction. They were like negatively and positively charged electrons and protons that repelled each other.

It was like this natural repulsion created a real reason why people should be supported by charitable agreement rather than totally self-interested dealings. David thought to himself how if more people engaged with this dynamic and understood it, the industrial world could begin to function. Instead a lack of charitableness seemed to be the volcano of energy that powered it as a self-interest machine.

David began to feel a sort of contest between himself and his new housemates that he recognized as different from his former housing at Allen Avenue. At Danforth Street he remembered his age and this left him thinking about how people age differently but time passed for everyone. Even people living sort of out of sync with each other being of different ages didn't diminish the sense the time was passing for everyone. What seemed to be the real difference was whether or not people were engaged or enjoying their time. There was a long pause as Victoria concluded her sort of open talk about herself, and the other occupant of the TV room, who now seemed to be only half-listening as he watched the news, slowly revealed that he was aware of this others.

Jerry, who was not as old as Victoria, sort of seemed to be a person who kept to himself. He was about 50 and knowing that Jerry had spent time in a mental hospital made David feel both wary and like he had something in common with him. Jerry was a large, slightly overweight man over six feet tall with gray and dark hair and a slightly misshapen head that didn't so much make him look odd as it just distinguished him as a relatively

non-athletic type. In many ways Jerry would look affable and attentive but when he opened his mouth to speak, spontaneously sharing his story in an introductory way, David got a little sense that he was sort of a misfit much like Victoria and himself who blended into daily life with others but over time revealed a unique personality.

Jerry was sort of uprooted in his living circumstance, like David, and he revealed that he was living in Maine but disconnected from his family in Indiana. He had gone to college and started a career but that was when he had problems. Apparently his plan, or perhaps his family's plan for him, of becoming an accountant doing people's taxes for them hadn't worked out. He was a bachelor, and most importantly of all, he was estranged from his family. He didn't really say as much although it seemed to be a feature of his social skills that he handled his indigence fairly well.

Like a relatively adaptive person who was not unused to sort of finding their own way he revealed his story in parts, saying first that he had liked college, then sharing that he was a basketball fan who watched basketball a lot. To David, Jerry was an interesting type because Jerry was a sports fan who didn't play sports and David usually chose his sports from a perspective of involvement. You could imagine Jerry as your accountant, knowledgeable and businesslike, but you sensed that he was discontented with professionals and professionalism. David wondered if he was a good roommate because everything seemed to depend on

his social skills and he didn't have the excuse of being young like his housemates at Allen Avenue.

Somehow Jerry was a sympathetic figure to David and it seemed like the particular tragedy of Jerry was that he was a smart sociable person with an advantageous background but his heart was elsewhere when it came to his profession. When you thought about it, it took a particular kind of person to embrace a subject like accounting and Jerry learned too late that he wasn't it.

Instead, Jerry said he read obsessively and that was how he passed the time. Then there was Jerry's dislike of cops. He didn't get into details but he said he said as much indirectly when he commented on the news which was on TV. That was the most striking thing about Jerry. Trying to be an accountant while keeping distance from enforcement was a lofty goal.

Accounting inspired sharp edges and the embrace of law and order but Jerry seemed unenthused about any of that. "The cops are damned brutal," he exclaimed about the apprehension of a suspect in a murder case.

Jerry went on about the news and his objection to the military budget. At first he didn't seem like an antiwar type but as he went on it was clear that in an unassuming, regular-sort-of-guy way Jerry was very opposed to the military and you could imagine that it was a small leap to not like the cops very much.

David found him very likable in an off-putting, bristling sort of way. He seemed like a person who had opinions and commitments but was sort of wandering around in

the vestibule of life. David modestly marveled because he was always intrigued by people who successfully kept ties with psychiatry and social services while pursuing their own ends. Jerry seemed to have been disabled a long time and David wondered about the story of how he first came into contact.

David sat for a while with Jerry and Victoria watching the news and he sort of acclimated to the two. They seemed a little opposite to each other or at least represented some of the varying backgrounds that David continued to be challenged by because if there was any particular thing that David found himself focusing on it was the distinctly social obstacles in his life. It was like the most important thing he encountered regularly was how to relate to the people he came in contact with. Schizophrenia didn't really make him look unusual or act unusually anymore although there had been a time in his life when he really put his foot down and was decidedly unique. But from most people the question he read on their mind was, "What's special about you?" It was why people like himself and Jerry and Victoria always told their story when they met new people and David realized that over time their lives came down to psychosocial talents and skills that other people considered a deficit or deformity.

David felt uncomfortable sitting with Jerry and Victoria after they had all shared their stories so he excused himself and went upstairs. There was a winding, old staircase to the second floor and he could see inside the

office where Alicia was sitting and passing the time. In his room again, he sat on the bed and let himself relax and he thought about his new situation. It was very different really being in a new environment and especially being with new people. It was somehow refreshing to have a sense that people who were older faced similar problems. He tried to think about the time passing and dwelled on every second, every minute, every 5 minutes, every hour, every morning, every afternoon, every day and every week. He thought about the months and seasons and years and remembered how awkward it had been to meet Peter. It was like when he first got to Allen Avenue everyone seemed sort of young and incompetent but after a short time he could see their efforts to fit in and grow. Peter had especially impressed him because, like David and that age, he had an interest that he wanted to explore. It still troubled David to remember that Peter had gone to the hospital. Peter's ambitions were so half-formed and Peter was only partly an extrovert. It seemed like a small thing but it had so much to do with how a young person discovered the world around them.

David realized to all at once that it was because he was old enough to be nostalgic that he was even thinking about these things. Peter wasn't just another boy to compete with or socialize with, he was someone coming up behind him and he would be doing things like making pizza while David tried to be an appropriate older person. It was a lot to expect of someone for them to do chores and ordinary tasks and you had to respect them for it and not take it for granted.

He remembered how at age 16, 17, 18, even 30 he felt like he was walking on water somehow and split second reactions had carried him through episode after episode, always driven by a nagging heart to want to do something like become a writer. The thought about Peter, driven to become a rapper, was in contrast to the advantages he had gotten. At the same age, at a different point in time, Peter was living his days in a group home and taking apart old stereo speakers while he, David, was once grappling with the social challenges of living in a dormitory. Where Peter had been living in youth detention not considering aspiring to be a corrections officer, David was bouncing off the walls with the apparent weightlessness of contemplating a successful adult future.

David had come and gone returning to Whitfield and wandering far trying to get away and think while Peter was confined to one place and compelled to think about whatever was on the lesson plan. David wondered if it was fair or if in different places in different circumstances Peter would have had enough obstacles come up that he would have been nakedly pursuing an optimistic future as well. David concluded that it was somehow a combination of both. Both David and Peter were unique but in some ways the world fit itself more advantageously to David, despite David's struggles and lack of a home.

It felt like a responsibility, like looking back at Tim Robbins at Whitfield, who hadn't reached college. His blackness, new and exotic to David who grew up in a

white place without watching TV, seemed a small difference compared to his different origins and lifestyle which were also rooted in austerity and churchgoing. It was like similar impulses and influences in one instance had been fatal while in David's story it was just a lot of unorthodox risks. That experience had left David reluctant to be philosophical about death and unable to dismiss the significance of special advantages in youth. As well, he never forgot the brazen callousness of the other wealthier, youth who shallowly and uncaring couldn't see past the alleged fact that Tim Robbins had been committing a crime. It never seemed to David that it foreshadowed good tidings when people didn't have enough empathy for their classmates to advocate for them when things went wrong, and the glib slipperiness of met needs and largesse seemed somehow not entirely desirable after the witnessing of how disastrously it contrasted with penury.

To David there was a bewildering number of paths to subsistence but curiously the one that helped him make his way in the world was the more drastic path. If David had never become exasperated and desperate, if he had not made special exertions of himself along the way remembering the fate of those who were left behind, he never would have found himself in the tenuous but special circumstances that had evolved now so that he could make a contribution to the world in a form he chose rather than being in a constant state of responding to the half-thought-out, promiscuous material needs of those around him.

There seemed to be such a contrast between Catherine and his other classmates who were generous and helpful but with demanding limits and constrictions. Catherine's happy house which sometimes seemed a little solemn was one which had a big enough heart to sacrifice the children for the benefit of a transient and precarious world. Young people lived in a different, more generous and more ruthless world that was all the more precarious for preparing to drown them in the bathtub of cold waters of advantageous exchange.

It was like there was a "glass ceiling" which was set quite low in life and good feelings were eventually vulnerable to evisceration if one didn't find a way to break it, and breaching it was so often buoyed up by leisure activities. David thought about Peter's music and felt both hopeful and apprehensive that they might eventually transform into an activity that won his life for him repeatedly and even reliably. He felt the same about himself in his journal. Would it become something like that, which carried its own interest along with it? David felt as if he were constantly about to lose his job when he wrote, and this was even when he wrote for non-commercial purposes, as if you could be entirely mercenary in literature. Many stories somehow seemed to exist on a higher mental plain.

He wondered about his fate and remembered Isaiah's earnest cheerfulness combined with the mundane drudgeries of daily life that had puzzled him on those trips back to Whitfield. It seemed like in a socially functional world someone's fate should be assured if

they did good works and were diligent but it was not at all assured. Fate always hovered like a dust cloud threatening to envelope him and he realized that only a footing sufficient to dance away either deliberately or capriciously might serve to save oneself. Always one had to separate oneself from the assembled troop and speak or sing or step or plod.