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Belial's Daughter

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BELIAL'S DAUGHTER

By

Roseanna M. Larrin

THESIS

Submitted to
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SIGNATURE APPROVAL FORM

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ABSTRACT

BELIAL'S DAUGHTER

By

Roseanna M. Larrin

Historically, evil has been viewed as an individualistic trait with internal causes, but research in the fields of anthropology, sociology and social psychology, as well as extrapolation from older studies, changing social constructs, and emerging philosophical thought disagree with this view. Today, the evil behaviors of many individuals and groups are often attributed to social circumstances. We now have clearer guidelines to recognize and intervene in evil as a course of action. Malignant narcissism, sociopathic paradigms, and the social pressures of conformity are important explanations that have resulted from case histories and interviews of people who have received these diagnoses.

However, without intimate contact with such a person, truly comprehending what drives this particular engine is like trying to explain an orange without ever having experienced one. It is one thing to academically address the dehumanizing, humiliating, and objectifying of individuals by sociopaths and quite another to live through it. Children who grow up in this kind of environment unconsciously adapt to it and whether or not they follow the path laid out before them depends upon their class, gender, and race, as well as the aspects of their individual personalities. In this thesis, I explore life with my sociopathic father who received this diagnosis in the late 1940s, and the way in which I realized that genetics are not destiny, a toxic environment is not a prison, and to remember that a water-lily has its roots in mud.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Ben and my sons, Andrew, Adam, and Zachary.

To love and be loved is the best thing in life.

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This thesis follows the format prescribed by the *MLA Style Manual* and the Department of English.

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Belial came last; than whom a Spirit more lewd
Fell not from Heaven, or more gross to love,
Vice for itself. To him no temple stood
Or altar smoked; yet who more oft than he
In temples and at altars, when the priest
Turns atheist, as did Eli's sons, who filled
With lust and violence the house of God?
In courts and palaces he also reigns,
And in luxurious cities, where the noise
Of riot ascends above their loftiest towers,
And injury and outrage; and, when night
Darkens the streets, then wander forth the sons
Of Belial, flown with insolence and wine.
Witness the streets of Sodom, and that night
In Gibeah, when the hospitable door
Exposed a matron, to avoid worse rape.

-Paradise Lost, i. 490-504

'All people are shit' is a motto that cannot be overemphasized; the underlying nature of all Human Beings is Satanic, selfish and sexual. There are no clean motives, altruistic aims or benevolent people.

-Vexen Crabtree, *The Aspect of Belial*

Introduction

I became interested in defining and understanding evil after leaving home and reflecting upon the carnage my violent, alcoholic father left behind in the emotional lives of our family. My quest began with trying to understand my sociopathic father, and that search expanded to social and cultural institutions such as religion and the paternal family paradigm that allowed him and others like him to practice this particular brand of terror. These societal extensions then became a drive to comprehend the global puzzle of what sort of intellectual acrobatics are required to rationalize genocide, social inequality, corporate misdeeds, and a whole host of miseries imposed upon innocent others.

“Overture” provides some academic, religious, and aboriginal definitions of evil that explore why it exists, how it perpetuates itself, and why these ideas became so relevant to me throughout my life experiences. This section will clarify concepts and terms that will be used in the personal narratives as my father’s story unfolds. “Microcosms” and “Macrocosms” relate in-house family dynamics followed by the sociological constructs of race and gender in our culture. “Epilogue” brings it all together.

I draw upon the research and writings of social psychologist Philip Zimbardo, the orchestrator of the Stanford Prison Experiment, which was conducted in 1971 and has become the seminal social psychology experiment on situational evil. Zimbardo spent thirty-five years studying and elaborating upon his experiment, bringing us closer to an understanding of evil and how good people can be seduced to behave with evil intent through the “power of situations” (Miller 2). In his research, Zimbardo has tried to

understand how some people are easily persuaded to do evil while others easily refuse. As a result, he has posed the “ordinariness of goodness” (*Lucifer* 486) in response to Hannah Arendt’s “banality of evil” (qtd. in Miller 252).

Good people, we believe, are constrained by their consciences and each person is directed to follow his or her own conscience in our individualistic society. But, what is a conscience? Martha Stout has proposed the first psychological definition of conscience in *The Sociopath Next Door*: “Conscience is a sense of obligation based in an emotional attachment to another living creature (often but not always a human being), or to a group of human beings, or even in some cases to humanity as a whole” (*Sociopath* 25). Stout skillfully delineates between her definition of conscience and what most laypeople think of as our conscience, Freud’s superego:

Still, superego is not the same thing as conscience. It may feel like conscience subjectively, and may be one small part of what conscience is, but superego by itself is not conscience. This is because Freud, as he conceptualized the superego, threw out the baby with the bathwater, in a manner of speaking. In ejecting moral absolutism from psychological thought, he counted out something else too. Quite simply, Freud counted out love, and all the emotions related to love. Though he often stated that children love their parents in addition to fearing them, the superego he wrote about was entirely fear-based. In his view, just as we fear our parents’ stern criticisms when we are children, so do we fear the excoriating voice of superego later on. And fear is all. There is no place in the Freudian superego for the conscience-building effects of love,

compassion, tenderness, or any of the more positive feelings. (*Sociopath*
33)

The genius of Stout's writing style is how she takes difficult, multifaceted concepts and redefines them in such a way so the average person can understand them. Her concept of conscience as rooted in love rather than fear brought some understanding and peace for the response I received from my father when I asked him how he had viewed his children when he was drunk and raging. His response had been "like pets." Without conscience there is no sense of others.

I was first introduced to the rhetoric of evil in M. Scott Peck's 1983 book, *The People of the Lie*. Here, I encountered evil as a mental illness. Because Peck offered anecdotal evidence from his experiences as a practicing psychiatrist, he was considered to be a "pop" psychiatrist in the science of psychology. While I do not follow Peck's writings as closely as I once did, I still believe his philosophical musings are valuable. To date, he is the only expert on evil who has weaved his observations and viewpoints with religious and philosophical concepts. Throughout his career, Peck identified with the Buddhist and Islamic philosophical systems and later converted to Christianity. It was through Peck, that I realized there is more than one way to be Catholic, and/or to be Christian:

The poor in spirit do not commit evil. Evil is not committed by people who feel uncertain about their righteousness, who question their own motive, who worry about betraying themselves. The evil in this world is committed by the spiritual fat cats, the Pharisees of our own day, the self-

righteous who think they are without sin because they are unwilling to suffer the discomfort of significant self-examination. (72)

“The discomfort of significant self-examination” would become a profound signifier of ego defense mechanisms such as transference, projection, and scapegoating in my studies in psychology as well as guidelines for adjusting my own behaviors. I began with a major in psychology, which was enhanced by the addition of a major in sociology, then English. I had no way of knowing until my undergraduate work was over that within this context of psychology and sociology I could finally understand my family dynamics. Prior to college, I had begun to find my way to a greater understanding of my life and the lives around me by experiencing different religious systems, Ojibwe culture and philosophy, and constant research into social and psychological issues.

Thus, from Zimbardo, I learned how to apply the results of social psychology studies to situations that I encounter every day. From Stout’s and Peck’s writings I learned how to weave anecdotal evidence, case studies, and complex psychological concepts into narratives that illustrate and apply these concepts to everyday life. All three writers use case histories to illustrate dysfunction, discuss their personal reaction to the situations they describe, and then discuss how and why so many dysfunctional behaviors are the result of trying cope with family or social problems. Drawing upon the styles of Stout, Peck, and Zimbardo, I tend to write nonfiction stories about people who have passed through my life and the ways they have been wounded by the social systems beyond their control such as institutionalized racism, sexism, and classism.

I end with my father, his background and the personal tragedies and social institutions that had a hand in shaping who he was and who he would become at the end

of his life. In my search, I have found that we are all connected, all vulnerable, and that through the construct of a world community we may save ourselves.

Overture

Whenever I tell people I study evil, they invariably take one of two tacks: they mention Hitler or claim evil behavior is human nature because it is ubiquitous. Many people who believe evil to be human nature also tend to believe in the survival of the fittest and a “dog-eat-dog” world. I have never believed human nature is evil nor have I found any evidence it is. One idea in support of it not being the human condition is the fact that many of us do not always act in our own best interests, thus engaging in altruistic behaviors. In addition, many of us work hard to determine what is right and fair.

We have been trying to define evil for millennia and the only thing we all agree on is that it isn't good. We tend to think that the inherent evil in the genocides that haunt our planet is obvious, but it is not. If it were, they would not continue to occur. The nature of evil is shifty: just as we think we've gotten a handle on one part of it, another facet is exposed. We no sooner close our book on Charles Manson and Jim Jones appears, and we have a new visage of evil. There is no guidebook for evil. As with most things about human behavior, evil is not black against white nor as clear cut as we could hope it is.

Malignant narcissism is part of M. Scott Peck's definition of evil in his book, *People of the Lie: the Hope for Healing Human Evil*. Peck further refines his definition: evil is a force “residing inside or outside of human beings that seeks to kill life or liveliness” (43). Peck quotes Erich Fromm's expansion of the definition of necrophilia to include people who need to control others and prevent them from having any agency of their own. They try “to avoid the inconvenience of life by transforming others into

obedient automatons, robbing them of their humanity” (43). This is in contrast to biophilic people, individuals who encourage diversity and individual differences, and are aligned with other life forms as well.

When I consider money and power as “dead things,” it makes sense when Erich Fromm laments the rise of necrophilia in today’s world where nothing is sacred and everything is a commodity. If I consider the treatment of my mother at the hands of my father and the ways he moved to kill her spirit, to take away her agency, to keep her in thrall to him, I have no problem identifying his necrophilia towards her and his malignant narcissism.

One of the most important aspects of Peck’s definition is that evil people cannot bear being displeasing to themselves, and this failure to question their self-righteousness or their motives often precedes evil behavior. Scapegoating, an ego-defense mechanism, begins as these individuals engage in projection and sacrifice other people on the altar of their perfect self-image. In short, because evil behavior often accompanies feeling pious and self-righteous, they project their own evil onto the world instead of facing their own shortcomings. If self-criticism is a call to a personality change and spiritual growth, then the narcissist have must get rid of, discount, and diminish all evidence of shortcomings. Peck calls this “an extreme form of self-protectiveness which invariably sacrifices others rather than themselves” (75).

Peck distinguishes evil people from the average sociopath. Sociopaths are “moral imbeciles” who don’t care what people think. On the other hand, truly evil people worry a lot about what people think and social norms. They are not so concerned with being

good as they are as being seen as good. Thus, their behavior is about pretenses—a lie, and this is why the title of Peck’s book is *People of the Lie*. Peck explains that, unlike the sociopath who seems to possess no sense of wrong or right, the “people of the lie” do understand wrong and right as demonstrated by their contortions to cover things up. Thus, it is not a defect of conscience as much as it is denying conscience its due (76).

I can’t help but think of Ted Haggard the founder and former head of the New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado. At one time, this was the most powerful megachurch in the United States (Sharlet). Haggard engaged in a struggle of biblical proportions. Even as he consistently attacked homosexuals, marginalizing and condemning them, even as he dictated what a good and righteous life was, he engaged in homosexual behaviors and used illicit drugs. During his interview with Oprah Winfrey, he explained how his sexuality was “complicated,” presumably more so than for the rest of us frail human beings. His insistence on being more complicated than the rest of us is classic cognitive dissonance, a painful state of mind in trying to hold two disparate beliefs about who we are. In order to reduce our distress, we rationalize and try to justify our actions (Brown 126). As Nietzsche succinctly put it : “‘I have done that,’ says my memory. ‘I could not have done that,’ says my pride and remains inexorable. Finally, my memory yields” (qtd. in Leahy 285).

To Haggard’s credit, he did not continue to sacrifice his gay escort, but gradually came to accept responsibility for his actions, and obviously, he is still struggling. I understand what a great trial this has been for him both spiritually and emotionally, but he apparently never stopped to think about what his hidden behaviors would mean for his

family. Evil behavior choices help us develop a hole-in-the-head mentality, and we see what we want to see.

Peck may be correct in stating that true evil is not sociopathic, but the two seem to be inextricably entwined or perhaps they spring from the same malevolent root. Martha Stout in her book, *The Sociopath Next Door*, goes into great detail about the predatory behaviors that sociopaths engage in and gives credence to the theory that evil behavior may be a mental illness. She cites identical twin studies which show that measureable inheritable personality traits are 35 to 50 percent innate (*Sociopath* 122). Conversely, this means that 50 to 65 percent of non-inheritable traits may be environmental. If one has a 35 to 50 percent chance of inheriting a predisposition towards sociopathic behaviors, then this also means that one has a 50 to 65 percent chance of *not* inheriting such a negative personality disorder. This is good news. Sociopaths feel fine about themselves. They don't believe that there is anything wrong with them and aren't aware of their severe emotional disconnect from the rest of humanity. This is why treatment is usually unsuccessful—they see no reason to change because there is no emotional pain to spur them to change. In other words, if I had inherited this predisposition and it was manifested, I would think I was just fine even if my world was in wreckage around my ankles.

My father was diagnosed as a sociopath in the late 1940s when that diagnosis was in its infancy. Theodore Millon, in his 1969 text, *Modern Psychopathology*, recounts a short history of sociopaths. First recognized by Philippe Pinel in the late 1700s, he realized how some of his patients were impulsive and chronically committing acts that were damaging to themselves and others, even though they were lucid and rational, and

referred to them as having a will that was an “involuntary vehicle” to their feelings and compulsions (*Modern* 428). J.C. Prichard diagnosed sociopaths as “morally insane,” and in the late 1800s, Koch threw in with “psychopathic inferiority” to replace “constitutional psychopath” (*Modern* 428). Emil Kraepelin was the first to divide his “psychopathic personalities” into groups such as “the liars, the unstable, and the criminal” (*Modern* 428). It was thought that these people were defective in themselves—a personal attribution. Freud, with his revolutionary emphasis on early child development, added a new focus on social upbringing and gave rise to today’s term of sociopathic personality, which emphasizes both social upbringing as well as adult anti-social behavior (*Modern* 428). Millon divides the sociopath into three subtypes: the antisocial sociopath, the exploitative sociopath, and the impulsive sociopath (*Modern* 432-434). He would later expand his list to ten dominant typologies: covetous, spineless, exploitative, abrasive, malevolent, tyrannical, malignant, unprincipled, disingenuous, explosive, and risk-taking (*Psychopathy* 162-170). In going through Millon’s list and ticking off the behaviors of my father, I believe that he hit the jackpot: the unprincipled psychopath, the disingenuous psychopath, the malevolent psychopath, and the explosive psychopath.

Additionally, the brain wave patterns of people diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder resemble the brain wave patterns that normally occur in children and adolescents (Sarason and Sarason 263). This supports still another theory that these individuals are simply emotionally retarded. Robert Hare reports in his book, *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us*, that, for some unknown reason, many psychopaths maintain their high level of criminal behavior until about the age of forty when it tends to decrease quickly. Theories as to why this happens

vary, but the one I have come to believe is that they mature, learn some forms of self-control, and are no longer overt in their behaviors. They go “underground.”

True to this model, my father mellowed in middle age and wasn't a “hellraiser” like he had been when he was younger. However, he continued his illicit activities. When I was in my mid-thirties and after he had remarried, he was having an affair with a woman two years older than I was. He regaled my brother and me with stories of being involved with the Mafia, of traveling all over the country to “secret” militias, and other bizarre things. It was also at this time that he began to share the stories of his murders. I had thought he was telling us these things to unload them, but later I realized he was reliving them in the remembering—psychically fondling his stories. As an ex-felon convicted of a violent crime, he could not legally own guns, yet he carried a small silver pistol in his back pocket at all times and had guns stashed all over his house and garage.

Hare also distinguishes between the sociopath and the psychopath. Those who believe that the disorder results from social forces and early experiences tend to use sociopath. Those who believe that it is a combination of psychological, biological, and genetic components tend to use psychopath (22). Since I believe that psychological, biological, genetic, sociological, and early experiences all combined to make my father who he was, I use both terms to describe him.

Philip Zimbardo is among those who believe that evil behavior is situational social behavior determined by the nature of the group combined with idiosyncrasies of the individuals. That is, given the right set of circumstances, any of us can be persuaded to commit evil acts. His definition of evil is: Evil consists in intentionally behaving in

ways that harm, abuse, demean, dehumanize, or destroy innocent others—or using one’s authority and systemic power to encourage or permit others to do so on your behalf. In short, it is “knowing better but doing worse.” (Lucifer 5)

It was Zimbardo who created and orchestrated the Stanford Prison Experiment in 1971 which illustrated how, given the right set of circumstances, average people may succumb to authoritarian power and perpetrate heinous acts against other human beings. Zimbardo refers to this experiment as “a powerful illustration of the potentially toxic impact of bad systems and bad situations in making good people behave in pathological ways that are alien to their nature” (195). After the 2004 exposure of the abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq by United States military personnel, Zimbardo wrote *The Lucifer Effect* and went into great detail about what happened during the Stanford Prison Experiment, applying some of those same principles to what happened at Abu Ghraib. Zimbardo testified about the situational dynamics in the prison at Chip Frederick’s trial on his behalf. Zimbardo maintains that the psychosocial dynamics are comparable in both situations. He insists that nine soldiers who were charged in the Abu Ghraib prison abuses were also victims of this particular system of power in this particular institution. In the chapter entitled, “Putting the System on Trial,” Zimbardo outlines the stresses and conditions put upon these soldiers by military bureaucratic incompetence and the CIA “ghosts” who instigated these abuses. He puts major players such as Donald Rumsfeld, George Tenet, and others “on trial” (380-443). More than once throughout his book, he points out that understanding the why does not excuse the behaviors that were chosen by the individuals but the situations should be taken into account when people are held responsible (230, 231).

Hanna Arendt coined the phrase “the banality of evil” in describing Adolf Eichmann to emphasize that, like Zimbardo, she believes any of us may be seduced into working all day committing crimes against humanity and then go home and be loving and sensitive spouses and parents. Studies are slim on why some people do not succumb to the situational forces brought to bear. Yet, the Underground Railroad, the French Underground during WWII, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s are shining examples of “the banality of goodness,” the ability to be inner directed and defy the social conventions of the times.

In “Opinions and Social Pressure,” social psychology experiments by Solomon Asch, individuals were asked to identify the middle longer line of three lines. Social pressure was exerted when all of the other people in the room, confederates in the study, reported that the longer line didn’t exist, that all three lines were of the same length. Only one quarter of the subjects tested maintained independent thought and was not swayed by majority opinion. Three-quarters of the people studied went along with the majority for various reasons, though many thought there was something wrong with them. They didn’t believe their own eyes and so went along with the social pressure (Asch 17).

The Stanley Milgram study, “Behavioral Study of Obedience,” scared me the most. In this study, people were ordered to shock a confederate to death by an authority figure. Less than half of the test subjects subjected to these authority demands were able to defy that authority figure and not administer the ersatz fatal shocks to the confederate acting as the test subject. Authority demands obedience and apparently few of us can stand up to it even when we believe it is wrong (Milgram 27).

I cannot deny that my father was stronger with my uncle in tow. He could be, in turn, the aggressor or the cheerleader. It was one of my maternal uncles who gave my father the green light to make his incest attempts. Once another man agreed with his view or was *perceived* to agree with him that made just about anything okay. People liked my father. He was glib, funny, and friendly; you just didn't want to cross him. Nor did you want to live with him.

My studies and research into evil began with religion. As a child, I learned in Catholic catechism classes that Satan was our great enemy, lurking around every corner waiting to snatch us from the arms of God. I wondered about this guy and what he gained by tempting us to swerve from our righteous paths. I also learned that we are all tainted from the day we are born with Original Sin, the black mark of Adam and Eve's disobedience. Much was made of this Original Sin and it was pointed out how women were weak because Eve gave in to the serpent, and that it is human nature to lean toward evil. I never felt particularly evil as a child, but that was probably that old trickster, the devil who could make us believe whatever he wanted. I wondered why Adam gave in so readily to Eve. And I liked snakes.

God is our "father in heaven," and because we want to be with him after we die, we should live a "good life," one free of evil acts. The nuns and priests could not have known what that meant to me or any of their young charges. I wondered about God-our-father because he behaved a lot like my own alcoholic father: he was capricious, cruel, punishing, and demanding. Where was our mother-in-heaven? Did God kill her, too? Why would anyone want more of this—why would anyone want to go to heaven? God seemed more evil to me than good while Satan seemed to have set us free.

As they taught us the stories of the Bible, I realized an emerging pattern of violence and retribution. “Vengeance is mine! saith the Lord,” and he proceeded to smite entire cities right out of existence. He even turned Lot’s wife into a pillar of salt just because she was curious about the fate of her friends and family and looked back to Sodom and Gomorrah.

The stories of Isaac and Job horrified me. God tells Joseph to sacrifice his son and he acquiesces with no argument and no discussion. However, God stays his hand at the last minute. Ah, it seems that it was just a test because He who demands that we trust Him, does not trust us. Job loses his family and God takes everything away from him to win a wager with Satan. When Job asks him why he has been the target of such bad behavior on God’s part, God puts it all on Job and tells him that he has no right to ask such a question because he is God. What kind of psychopathic tormentor is this guy? I lived in terror of God telling my parents to sacrifice me and getting caught up in one of his gambits.

No, I didn’t like God much; he was as scary and capricious as my alcoholic, sociopathic father and my depressed, borderline personality disordered mother. Just like my father, God flew into hideous, murderous rages. Just like my mother, he demanded love and adoration while hardly doing anything to earn it. The God that I learned about in the Old Testament behaved like a bratty, hyperactive four-year-old.

When we reached the New Testament, the life and times of Jesus, I was taught that this was God’s version of the “New Deal.” Now, I could do whatever I wanted and if I confessed on my death bed, I would still go to heaven because I was sorry. After all, Jesus had died for all of our sins. Ha, I thought, that’s easy. Except, during Lent we

were rounded up at the school and giddiyapped over to the church where we spent a couple of hours being empathetically brutalized and tortured along with Christ during “The Stations of the Cross.” We were told that as Jesus was whipped, he was verbally assaulted and made fun of by the evil Roman soldiers. Being socially inept and outcast, that sounded like most of my recesses. I felt awful: I didn’t ask him to do this. I wanted to make Jesus stop suffering, but I couldn’t because it had happened over 1900 years ago and we were still feeling guilty about it, still talking about it.

I was baptized twice, once in the hospital because, at three pounds, two ounces, I wasn’t expected to live. I spent a month in an incubator, kept warm and rotated on a regular basis like a little chicken egg. When my parents were allowed to take me home, I was baptized a second time at the church. My two younger sisters were not so lucky. They were buried at the Sacred Heart Cemetery in a place called “limbo” which was segregated from all the other Catholics in good standing. This was a gray area like an infant-purgatory. They couldn’t go to heaven because they weren’t baptized which removed the stigma of Original Sin, and therefore, the babies were not in the good graces of God. I was tormented with visions of myself in heaven for all eternity reaching down for my sisters in limbo. Hardly the heaven I expected.

Hell was a Hieronymus Bosch painting, and I spent hours peering over his infernal landscapes trying to map each sin as portrayed with its appropriate, infernal punishment. Our tormentors were amalgams of beasts and humans. These macabre images both fascinated and horrified me. I didn’t want to go there; I just wanted to look at it. Still, I wasn’t quite sure how to avoid hell.

The church had more rules and regulations than the Army and they were changed on whims. They no longer bury babies in limbo. St. Christopher was killed off. A good Catholic could have gone to hell for eating meat on a Friday in the past. If you were going to go to communion, you were supposed to abstain from food for a dictated amount of time which varied and then was abolished. Purgatory was where you went when you died if you had a few sins. You would only have to be there for a few centuries until you figured things out or someone prayed for you and erased some of the black soot on your soul. I prayed furiously for my ancestors, even the ones I didn't know.

I had problems with the hierarchy of the church. I didn't much care about the pope; he was too far away to impact us. Closer to home, the priests ran everything while the nuns waited on them hand and foot. Women were notoriously expendable in the Catholic Church; their value was in their chastity and reproductive capabilities. It was because of this attitude towards women that I chose the Old Testament name of Judith at my confirmation when all the other little girls chose Mary and Elizabeth. I wanted to be a warrior, to cut off all the Holofernes' heads and carry them in my skirt. I wanted to be like Mad Meg sacking hell. I wanted *agency*.

I had many splits with the Catholic Church. The first came in the ninth grade. We had a priest for catechism class who loved the jocks and let them sit on his desk at the front of the room, smirking and taunting the rest of us. This priest hated girls and took every opportunity to attack us in class, silencing us, and then berating us for that silence. He had a huge wart in the middle of his forehead and I was convinced that it was the Mark of Cain.

In my junior year, I was accused of stealing beer from the grocery store across from our high school. One after another, nuns and priests accused me of this deed even though I told them that it wasn't me. I came from the wrong kind of family, my tuition bill was long overdue, and I had been branded "bad." Finally, the young woman who had stolen from the store came forward and I was exonerated. She was from the right kind of family and everyone was shocked. There were no apologies made to me. After all, I probably just hadn't been caught yet. I was miffed at the lack of Christian understanding and humility on the part of my preaching elders.

I learned the bloody, violent, and often bawdy, history of the Catholic Church. I couldn't reconcile what I was taught with what I experienced, or what my Native American friends endured in Catholic orphanages. And, when our priest wanted to have an affair with my husband, well, that was the final straw.

I do not mean to pick on the Catholic Church. It was the starting point of my spiritual life. As I would later learn, many organized religions have blood on their hands. The nice Baptist ladies down south used to have bake sales to finance the Ku Klux Klan (McLemore, Romo, and Baker 265). When the United States were colonies, the Puritans in Massachusetts established the Congregational Church as the state religion. They considered Quakers a "cursed sect of heretics," and if they were found in the colony, they were jailed, whipped, and expelled. Four Quakers were hanged just for being Quakers (Johnstone 268). As M. Scott Peck points out, one of the best places for evil to squat is in the dark corners of our churches, synagogues, and mosques, where it is disguised, cloaked in piety (76).

In high school I constructed an identity for myself by willfully seizing on the Blackfoot blood on my father's side. If I couldn't find acceptance here in my school, culture, or society, then maybe I should try one of my ancestors. A pan- Native American paradigm would carry me through my life with dabbles in Celtic thought, Buddhism, and Taoism.

Satanism became a special area of study when one of my employers assigned me to prepare a report on the rise of it in my hometown. I easily made contact with Rick Hartford and he instructed me in their beliefs. Hedonism was big; so were drugs. He discussed the four elements with me and told me how he'd attended a satanic sacrifice at the 16th Street beach in the early 1970s. I knew that murder: the young woman had her clothes and boots cut from her and had been stabbed over sixty times. When I asked him why, he simply shrugged and said, "Satan demands it."

"Did he come?" I asked.

"No."

"What would you all have done if he did?"

"I'm not sure."

"Who else was there?"

"I can't tell you that. That would be dangerous for both of us."

Cryptic and smug, Rick later joined a cult that received energy through their bare feet on the earth, and he eventually committed suicide. In all the years that I have followed it, the most dangerous thing I found about Satanism is what people *think* it is supposed to be. Maybe all gods demand a bloodletting.

All spiritual belief systems have some guidelines on evil, how to recognize it, and how to deal with it, except, of course, when one of their own is a sociopath. Stout points out that sociopaths are found in all cultures but are rarer in collectivistic societies than in individualistic ones (*Sociopath* 136). The one thing that is always recognized is that one “evil” individual can bring down the entire group. It is dangerous to allow unscrupulous, unfeeling people free rein. According to Martha Stout, the Eskimos had a unique way of dealing with the sociopaths in their midst: they went hunting, and shoved the sociopath off the ice into the ocean (*Sociopath* 136). The problem with that is we then are complicit in what we are trying to circumvent.

Born in 1954, I grew up knowing about the Holocaust. My father used to watch documentaries on Hitler’s Germany and the Final Solution. I sat there with my eyes wide in horror and glued to the TV. Nazi soldiers were stacking their grisly “cordwood,” emaciated Jewish bodies, in trenches, or they were proudly having their pictures taken, smiling, with one of their blackstrapped boots resting upon a body or two. These documentaries terrified me on many levels: the victims were Jewish which meant that next time it could be Catholics; there were also gypsies, homosexuals, mentally retarded, the sick, and the old. These people could have just as easily had brown hair or some other capricious social ascription of “wrongness” to define their undesirable status. I saw the bodies of children my age in those trenches and I wondered what kind of adults could kill children. Most of all, I wondered how these men, and it was always clear that men were the ones in power, could individually participate in these atrocities.

Since watching those historic films, I have lived through much genocide. Each one reveals a new level of horror, for there is no shortage of evil imagination when it

comes to torture and ways of social control. Each one seems to compete with the last for ways of forcing people to overcome their natural repugnance for murder. We become habituated to each new methodology. Recently, the headlines screamed of rape as a tool of war, as though that was news. Most women, except for the most immured, will state how the threat of rape is always with us no matter where we live on the planet.

The Rwandan genocide of the Tutsis by the Hutus was a purely social construct. The colonizers, the Belgians, preferred the Tutsi over the Hutus because they were tall and good looking compared to the shorter, squatter Hutus, and so they must be more intelligent. Presumably they were more like the Belgians, and when they left, the social atmosphere allowed for egregious, vengeful behavior towards the Tutsis. That these two tribes had lived together and intermarried for centuries before they were colonized was forgotten. The colonizers social construction of reality was all that functioned.

Here in the United States, we tend to marginalize and metaphorically limit other social groups intellectually. It always begins with words: Indians are always drunk, Blacks are lazy, women are weak, children “belong” to their parents, and men aren’t faithful by nature. Each is a way of objectifying and dehumanizing entire groups without ever having to deal with an individual.

All of us carry a construct within us of what we consider a gradient of evil based on our experiences. Those who grew up being beaten weekly by their parents may believe that they are being better parents when they beat their children intermittently. As I prepared to leave my first husband, both of my parents demanded to know why I was leaving because they thought I had it pretty good—after all, the man didn’t beat me.

Sociopaths do not think of themselves as evil people, although many of them know that something is missing in them. My father was well-liked and had many friends and this kind of social mirroring helped him maintain the self-image of being gregarious and “damn fine company.” A friend of mine once told me that Hitler couldn’t have been all bad; after all, he liked dogs.

Microcosms

The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother.

—Theodore Hesburgh

I look down on the man lying in the coffin. There is the slightest of lift to the right corner of his mouth, as though he will suddenly sit up, grin, and say, “gotcha.” I wait, tears spilling out, willing for him to do that but he doesn’t. I think about all of the things that have transpired between us, this man, my father. After everyone has gone, my brother and I are left alone with him. I look down on him for the last time, and feel the need to touch him just once more. I put my hand on his chest. Reflexively, my hand flies from his chest to my own: I’ve never touched a body before and the coldness of this now inanimate object horrifies me. These are the last memories of my father.

My grief is compounded by sudden hatred from my stepmother. She does not allow my brother or me to have anything of our father. She will send us boxes, she tells us, of his personal belongings. The one thing I request is the only baby picture of my father. As I leave his house forever, I know that the boxes will never arrive. We have memories of our father, who he really was, and this woman of insatiable greed about material and emotional things, hates us for the time that hadn’t included her. We walk away feeling discounted and orphaned. We had earned something of our father—a ring, a book, some token of who he was. The gifts of self from him in his later years were all we were left with: the things he built for us in our homes and the personal gifts from him, even though our lives with him had been tumultuous and violent.

When I returned home from burying my father, my children didn't know me—my grief was foreign and dissolute. I was angry at him for dying at a time when he was going to help me straighten out my life by moving to my farm and being Grandpa to my two boys. I also had a sense of relief, that it was over and I wouldn't have to be afraid of him anymore. I was finally an adult, but with an extreme void in my solar plexus. I worried that he was “stuck” between worlds, or worse. I prayed for understanding and held nothing against him because it hadn't been his fault anymore than it had been mine: he just made terrible choices and, in many ways, had been an awful father.

About six months after my father died I awoke from a terrible dream. He was at our farm working, but his nose was decaying and he smelled terrible. We sat at the kitchen table drinking coffee as was our habit and I told him that we needed to talk. I explained to him that he was falling apart, that I was worried he would scare the boys and I asked him what was going to happen. Dad grinned sideways, winked, and said, “I guess we'll just have to wait and see.”

I awoke gulping air and tears sprang to my eyes because of those lucid, grisly images of my father. I stood in the shower weeping and suddenly began laughing. He was telling me, or someone was showing me, that if I could have him back I wouldn't want him back. Death is final: whatever unresolved issues we have, stay that way.

I'm not sure when I realized that I was invisible to the outside world. As I moved through life, no one saw me unless it was through the lens of my father. He gave us a faint presence of personage as we stood, ghostlike in his shadow. That was why no

one ever helped us, why no one seemed to care, not even those who should have, about the desperate lives of my mother, brother, and me.

But, there were times when we were too visible. My twelfth summer, we have a stretch of peace. I am lackadaisical in my hyper-vigilance. My father tells me to go shut the back door, so I dutifully walk to the back door and, standing on the landing on tiptoes, reach out and catch the corner of the door with a finger, flinging it shut with a great slam. I turn and walk back through the kitchen and into the dining room where he is blocking my way. His eyes are slits, his thin mouth a grimace. His right hand sings out like a hooded cobra, catching me on my right cheek, back on my left, again on the right. Tears well up in my eyes and my hair sticks to my eyelids.

“Who do you think you are, the Queen of Sheba?” he hollers. “You’re nothing, a nobody, and you’ll never be anything!”

I stare at the floor as blood flows from my nose. I bring my hand up to catch it and look at him. It is my own fault because I let my guard down. Clear as a bell, a voice in some area of my brain tells me, “This has nothing to do with you. This was done to him and now he does it to you.”

“Yeah, bleed—you better fucking bleed!” He turns and strides back to his easy chair, the heels of his cowboy boots click on the wooden floor.

I go to the bathroom to stop the blood and then to my room. I think about that voice. I wonder where it came from. I’d heard it only once before, in kindergarten in Everett, Washington.

My kindergarten class settles into our seats for a movie in the school auditorium. A voice in my head tells me to pay attention because this story would “be important” to me during my life. I watch, spell bound as this sad, ugly creature is abandoned by its father, denied by its mother, mistreated, abused, and cast out. It bounces from lifestyle to lifestyle trying to find a place to belong, a place to be safe. Finally, after being beaten up, starved, chased, and frozen, after living hand-to-mouth and struggling from house to house, he finds a place to be alone and free from others picking at him. After a long, dark, lonely winter, he finds himself with beautiful creatures and he wonders if they will attack him. When they spy him, they welcome him and his heart expands in their acceptance, because they don’t think that he is ugly and misshapen. They see him as one of them. When he sees his reflection in the pond, he realizes that he is one of them: he is a swan.

Seven years later, I have heard this voice a second time, and now the first message is beginning to make sense because I feel like that ugly duckling and have a tender heart for all creatures cast out and misunderstood. I believe that trees have feelings, make room on my bed for my guardian angel to sleep beside me, and confess each tiny transgression to our parish priest. At first, I just wanted so much to be accepted, and to find a place to belong—to find my “swans.” Now, I just want not to be hurt anymore. I want to be invisible. I am very, very quiet.

It is a beautiful summer day a year later when my father comes slamming home, drunk and brooding. My mother, ironing in the kitchen, freezes with her iron in mid-air. When she dares to look up into his cruel, angry face, she bursts into silent tears.

“What’s the matter with you?” my father asks in a low voice. I stand in the kitchen doorway unable to run or hide.

“I’m scared,” my mother whines, cringing and writhing like a dog.

I wait for his arm to lash out as he sidles up to my mother who shrinks away from him. He tells her, “Well. We’ll just have to do something about that.” He turns and walks to the phone on the wall and dials a number. Soon, he is telling the phone that his wife is afraid of him and that they need to send a squad car over right away.

I turn and go into the living room where my little brother is watching cartoons. He is fine and seems impervious to the boiling, demanding teakettle in which we exist. I can’t decide. Should I go back into the kitchen to witness whatever fresh hell my father will unleash upon my mother, should I save myself and go to my room, or should I stay and keep an eye on my brother? In a violent alcoholic home there is no right or wrong; there is only wrong, so you learn to take the blows, real and imagined, physical and psychological. I settle on standing in the dining room where I can see into the kitchen and keep an eye on my brother in the living room.

This particular day had been building. Domestic violence has a pattern of artificial calm, followed by the building of tension until no one can stand it. Finally, there is the release. The beating is over and you are relieved because experience has taught you that now, even if only for a little while, things will be calm. Then, they start to build again. Alcohol just fuels it. I adapt because, as a captive child, there is nothing else I can do. Each cycle tears a bit of me away. At first, I think everyone lives this way, but that everyone covers it up just like we do. It’s a shock to realize that there is

something wrong in our home. And, that realization brings a shame that doesn't belong to me but clings to me anyway. People can feel that there's something not right about me. I'm too compliant, too eager to please, and always look for something from others. When a doctor tells me to put my arm in the air, I don't put it back down until he tells me to do so.

The police arrive and they knock at the door. My father strides from the kitchen through the dining room and across the living room to open the front door. My brother sits there watching *Clutch Cargo* and I wonder about this strangeness of the human mouths speaking from the cartoon heads.

“Get the fuck off my front porch!” he bellows at the two officers waiting outside.

“We got a call to come over here . . .” one cop begins, and my father slams the door in his face and stands there looking at the door. They will knock again because they have to.

My father leaps through the door slamming it behind him. I peek out the window. My father and the two policemen are a hideous, macabre ball rolling around in our front yard. As *Clutch Cargo* takes off in his plane, I start crying and run upstairs to my bedroom where, sitting on the floor, I peer over the windowsill and watch as my father, hands handcuffed behind his back, kicks off the back fender of the squad car trying to kick one of the officers in the groin. I sit back down, crying in great sobs, and when I look out again, he is face down on the trunk with both officers behind him.

All of our neighbors have come out for the show. They line both sides of the street, perching like seagulls on their lawns, sidewalks, and porches. Finally, the police

get my father into the back of the squad car where I can see him twisting and screaming, rabid in his rage. One of the officers is walking towards our house. He is tired out. He is sweating and puffing. I leap for the stairs because I have to protect my mother from the words he is going to say.

Later in the evening my father returns with the friend who bailed him out of jail and he sits at the dining room table, crying. He calls us, his children, to him. "I was in prison," he tells us. My brother and I couldn't care less that he was in prison. We both feign interest and say okay.

I go to my room. Reading and daydreaming are my life. I wonder why my father seems to think that being in prison a long time ago is an okay excuse for terrorizing his family, for drinking all the time, and for beating my mother. I wonder why he has all the power, all the say in everything. I wonder what will happen the day I get big and say "enough!" Only twelve, I know that day has not yet arrived, but it will because I've felt that storm building. I daydream about the day when I have power, the capacity to act, and the mobility to walk away.

Still, the thought of leaving my family brings tears to my eyes, and I live in constant dread of something fatal happening to one or both of my parents. My mother often talks of killing herself, sometimes drives like a maniac, and pops tranquilizers like popcorn. When my brother is afraid in the night, he calls my name, and I am the one instantly awake, telling him that he's okay, we're okay, go back to sleep. In some odd childish way, I am the hub of the family, both scapegoat and caretaker.

In the end, it is my brother who will escape and turn his back on us. My father and my mother will follow me separately when I move 400 miles away, because they finally divorce when I am twenty-two. I am their emotional touchstone until their deaths.

The most confusing thing as I grew up was that even with all of the violence, implied and actual, I loved my father and I was distant from my mother. Before my brother was born, I went everywhere with my father. He took me with him when he went fishing, and I would run around the woods and fields. We hunted cottontails and pheasants in the fresh winter air. One year we found an apple tree that still had apples on it and we ate some of them. To this day, they are the best apples I have ever eaten, and as an adult I would track them down from my memory and plant these snow apples on my own land. When we hunted squirrels, it was my job to walk around and in between the trees while my father stood still on the opposite side. The squirrels would go on his side of the trees to hide from me and he would pick them off with his .22 Winchester.

Once my brother is old enough, he tells me that I can't go with him anymore. He explains to me how it is time for me to start going places with my mother. I had never gone anyplace with my mother before, so why would I start now? I ask where we should go and he shrugs and tells me, "Fashion shows and stuff." Fashion shows. He might as well have said that we should do cartwheels to the moon, naked, and whistling "Ode to Joy."

I learned in Washington that my mother didn't want me around much. After my father would leave for work, she'd give me a pack of saltines and send me outside for the day, rain or shine. Now, apparently, my father didn't want me around either. I puzzled

over this secret appendage that boys had that made them so much more desirable than girls. At eight years old, I spent my free afternoons out in the woods and fields by myself. I continue to feel at home in the woods in a way that I never feel when I am around my own species. People often ask me if I am afraid living in the desolate, wild area where I live and I have to smile. I know what to expect from the woods. A bear will always be a bear, deer will always run, and squirrels will always chase each other. People are the real wild animals: I never know what they will do.

I attribute my love of the land to my father and this angers my mother because she says that she was the one who taught me to love nature. I just smile because I don't ever remember her leaving the house except to go to work. She has a selective memory about our collective her-stories.

Growing up, the only things that brought us together were when my father beat her or tore the house apart. He never failed to leave the house afterwards to go drinking and carousing. When I heard his truck pull off, I would run downstairs to pick up the pieces of my shattered mother. She still laughs about how, when I was eleven, I brought her two aspirin and a glass of water as she tearfully picked up the pieces of the mashed knickknacks in our living room. Aspirins, to an eleven-year-old, were magical beans.

Still, she just never warmed up to me and seemed to view me as the competition rather than her daughter. Years later she would resentfully tell me that I was independent from the beginning and would have changed my own diapers if I could have figured out how. I tried to trace back, far back to when I first felt that resentment from her, but I wasn't successful. When I was well into my forties, she gave me an old stuffed panda

that my father had won on the punch boards when I was four. Laughing, I took the panda from her and put it in the rocking chair in my bedroom. Slowly, the old toy became really creepy. I would walk into my bedroom and it would be sitting there grinning for all its malevolent, empty self. Finally, I couldn't stand it anymore. I grabbed the thing and threw it in the attic. My husband laughed and teased me about it, and I felt sheepish about the whole thing. After all, I was a grown woman afraid of a stuffed animal, a toy. Then, I dreamed about it.

I am four and hanging around the front door waiting for my daddy, Gordy, to come home. I'm not allowed to call him "Dad" or "Daddy." I have to call him Gordy like everyone else. He comes through the door and is carrying a big panda, which he gives to me. The next morning, as I run through the living room with my new toy, my mother snatches it away from me.

"Give me my panda," I demand with my fists on my hips.

"I'm keeping it," she tells me.

"No. It's mine. Give it back. Gordy gave it to me," I insist.

My mother turns and bends over to be face-to-face with me. "I'm his wife."

Unable to trump that, I let it go. I never see it again until the day my mother returns it to me. When I ask her why she took it from me, she tells me the same thing she always tells me: "I was so screwed up then. I don't know why."

It would be many decades before I realized that no one ever helped us because everyone was afraid of my dad. He was not just crazy, but evil-crazy. My mother told me how one night in the Frontier Club, a notoriously wild and violent bar in downtown Racine, my father broke a beer bottle on the bar and waved it in a man's face, threatening to take out his eyes. There is no timeline for so many of the things my father did. Each year flowed into the next and we kept a mental accounting for the day liberation might come. Most of the time, life with my father was a slow grind: he wore us down like water on rock. Then, suddenly, we'd have a spate of malefic happenings, and then back to the slow grind.

Dad would start in on Mom, feet wide for balance, and put his hands on her shoulders while she would defensively try to shield herself with her forearms. She wouldn't look at him, her head down and swinging as she pleaded, "Gordy, don't." He'd turn and look at us, jerking his head towards the upstairs and we'd shoot up those stairs to our separate rooms where we'd sit on our beds listening and waiting for the signal that it was over: the slamming of the front door.

It is by accident that, years later, I start watching a movie called *The Burning Bed*. I am transfixed, breathless because I am in that movie. He attacks his wife in the kitchen using the same stance that my father used; he jerks his head at the kids and they all run upstairs and huddle together on the bed. We all listen to pleadings, swearing, the sound of flesh on flesh, and we wait for it to be over. There isn't a damn thing we can do about it because we're kids. But, we don't quite get that we're just kids, so we feel guilty because we can't make him stop, because we're powerless, puny and worthless, and

because, even though we aren't old enough to make this stop, we are also responsible for it because we don't make Dad happy.

When my mother starts to work second shift at the hospital, it becomes my practice to wake as she leaves and listen to my father talk to himself and gauge whether it is safe to go back to sleep or not. I am afraid that he will fall asleep with a lit cigarette and burn our house down as we sleep or get my cat drunk again like he did one night. I lie in bed listening to him talk to my uncle, his brother, on the phone. He is laughing, exuberant over a fight he and my two uncles had gotten into in Dembrowski's Bar on Main Street.

“Did you see that look in his eyes when I cut him with that bayonet? I almost started laughing when he pissed himself.”

I roll over to go back to sleep. He wouldn't be burning the house down this night; he is too lucid.

I asked my mother why no one ever helped us and she explained that he was so cold-blooded that he terrified people. “I can remember one time when Grandma and Grandpa came over and Grandpa was carrying a rosary,” she told me.

“Why?” I asked, “To strangle him with?” He prayed for his daughter and this devil she'd married. But, unlike what happened with Abraham and Isaac, God never stopped his hand. God ignored us a lot. If he sees every little sparrow that falls, then we must be crows.

I discover by accident why my mother has married this man. When I am twelve, after a particularly brutal day at the hands of my mother, I decide that I must be adopted. I rummage around in the attic and look through boxes of papers that belong to my parents. I am going to find my adoption papers because I know that real parents would never treat their own child like this; it is the only thing that makes sense.

A short time later, I stand in front of my mother with their marriage certificate in one hand and my birth certificate in the other. Married, May 15, 1954. Born August 20, 1954. I had only hoped that I was adopted because in my childish way of thinking, that would be a good reason for the harshness, neglect, and abuse that went on in our home. The truth was so much worse than I could have imagined. *I* was responsible for it all. If I hadn't taken hold, there wouldn't have been this shotgun wedding and things would have been different.

When I am older, my mother tells me the truth of her pregnancy, how my father had thrown her down a flight of stairs trying to dislodge me but I held on for dear life. She and the doctor conspired together. They would tell everyone that I was premature and, like the snot I am, I came early. I exposed their lie and shamed my mother with my first breath as onlookers counted only three months from wedding to baby.

Psychology tells us that we don't have memories from before we can talk. Anything from before that time is "memories in feelings" and we cannot translate the primitive emotional unconscious without using the words of our consciousness (Klein, *Envy* 180). We need to know words in order to formulate memories. Yet, I remember crawling across our coffee table and eating red pistachios and not liking them because I

was too young to know that the red parts were shells and you weren't supposed to eat them. I remember my father pouncing on my mother, putting his hands around her neck and choking her and all I could do was cry loudly, my fingers in my mouth, screaming Mama. I was barely walking, much less talking, and this memory didn't surface until I was well into my twenties and able to ask my mother about it.

My mother looked at me with sad, tired eyes. "He always got crazy when he drank whiskey," she told me. "It's the Indian blood in the Larrins—they're all like that." When I ask her if she ever thought to hit him back, her eyes instantly fill with fear and she tells me that is what happened the night I remember from so long ago. Her sadness repelled me because she waited so long to take action, and so much damage had been done. No one wants to identify with the abused. This was a primeval dance between her and my father: my brother and I were just along for the ride.

In my thirties, he is trying to explain to me how the world works. He tells me, laughing, how he and the other men at the auto body shop where he worked had trapped an insurance adjuster. All the adjuster had to do was okay one inflated estimate, and when the insurance company paid, they would all split the overage. One mistake, one little kickback, was all it took. He chuckled how the man had cried like a baby when the facts were explained to him, how once in, there was no out. If he tried to stop, they'd destroy him and his family, and he'd do time in prison and then where would his family be?

"Jeez, Dad, what did you do that to him for?"

“Whaddya mean? It was his own fault. He should have never gotten involved in that shit in the first place. He had a nice family, went to church on Sundays, and he just had to have that easy way out. Tough shit. Dumb fucker.”

The voice told me that this is what evil does: it has to try to destroy everything good. It sits like a fattened venomous spider waiting for the next fly to suck dry and cast aside. My father had no qualms about doing this because that insurance man had everything. Out of his own free will, he padded an estimate, not realizing that they would not allow him just this one. He could have then made the choice to stop anyhow and take whatever came his way, but he simply got sucked in deeper and deeper because he believed there was no way out. People who behave in evil ways all *appear* to be nice people, but those “nice people” have no trouble zeroing in on possible victims.

I think about that man from time to time. He’s probably dead now, that was so many years ago, but I think about the terror he must have lived with: the terror of being found out, losing his family and reputation, everything he’d worked for all of his life, and with no redemption on the horizon. Judas is everywhere.

The first time I stood up to my dad, I was fifteen and simply sick and tired of all his cruelty and meanness. Only someone of great intimacy like a parent or a spouse knows exactly when to parry and then when to strike, thrusting the verbal sword into the vulnerable human part of your psyche. He’d been damaging the feminine part of me for a very long time. When he beat my mother he taught me that women were weak and easy prey. He often would finish his dinner and then get cleaned up to go out for the

night, telling my mother the entire time how she should stop fucking every man she crossed paths with. Apparently, a woman's value had something to do with sex, but I wasn't quite sure exactly how that worked. All I knew was that I wasn't ever going to go there and have a life like my mother's.

On the day that I first talk back to him, my father comes home from work early and goes directly into the bedroom, calling my mother in after him. I stand in the kitchen straining to hear what he is saying to her but I can't make it out. She walks out of the bedroom with a resigned, guarded look on her face and he is right behind her. They cross the kitchen and both go upstairs to the bathroom. I sit in the living room watching but not watching the television, trying to figure out what he is up to. After a while I get up and stand at the bottom of the stairs and I can see that the bathroom door is open. I listen.

"You smell like a whore," he is telling my mother from his perch on the toilet.

My mother is silently crying in the bathtub where he is making her douche in front of him. Horrified, I gently call up, "Mom! Are you okay?"

"Go back and watch TV. This is none of your business," my father hollers down.

"I'm talking to my mother!" I shoot back.

"Rosie, don't," my mother pleads with me. "You'll only make it worse."

I snort and turn away and walk out the front door. How could it get any fucking worse?

When I return my family is watching television just as though we're the fucking Cleavers. Yep, that is us, the Bizarro-land Cleavers.

“Fuck” became my new favorite word and from that day on for the next three years, I was fucking pissed off about every fucking thing. I began to drink and smoke and then I discovered drugs. Drugs were everywhere, and my friends and I found a source for pharmaceutical grade LSD, but we weren’t too particular. We’d smoke or ingest just about anything and we hitchhiked everywhere. I only went home to sleep and didn’t do very much of that. I’d go to school and afterwards walk until exhaustion, then go home to do homework and on to bed. On the weekends I prowled around for anything that would make me numb. I didn’t care what it was just as long as I didn’t have to think about what was going on at home. If I couldn’t find anything on the streets then I’d take my parents’ tranquilizers. I wanted to be like them, turned away and not feeling anything.

Fifteen passed into sixteen and I had a class I actually liked. It was a minorities class and I worked hard at it. Even though I wasn’t a minority, our Blackfoot blood was too diluted, I still felt like a minority and could relate to the misery we studied in their lives.

My mother began working third shift at the hospital and I watched over my brother when my dad didn’t get home in time. He had joined AA, but the fact that he no longer drank hadn’t changed the dynamics in our house. He was still He-who-must-be-obeyed, but he’d begun relating to me differently ever since that day of the bathroom. He wanted to talk politics, to hear my opinion on things. When my mother pulled her trick of wrapping my hair around her hand and yanking me around the kitchen, for the first and only time in my life, I called her a fucking bitch. My father interfered and asked me to try to get along, for his sake. There were no more demands from him, only requests.

I fall asleep on the couch waiting for him to get home so I can go upstairs to bed. I wake to him standing over me.

“We had a young woman at our meeting tonight who was talking about something I want to talk to you about,” he says and he kneels down by the couch. Instantly alert, I stare at the TV as I listen to him.

“She was talking about how she’d fallen asleep on the couch and her father came in and started playing with her boobs. She pretended to sleep, but she really liked it and wanted to know what to do about it. What should I have told her?”

The voice in my head screams, *it’s bullshit, don’t believe it*. With my heart in my throat I tell him, “I don’t know and I don’t care.”

I quickly get up and run upstairs to bed, shutting my door behind me. I lie in bed wondering about what he said and why. Then it occurs to me that I won’t be able to hear him creeping up the stairs with my door closed, so I quietly get up and open it again. I fall asleep to the sounds of the TV.

One night he gives me a little speech about how incest was reserved for royalty, how all the kings and queens of Europe were interrelated. I tell him I don’t give a crap and go to bed. Another night, he forces me to look at a brochure on pornography. I look at all the small pictures of naked people in different poses that run across the bottom and the sides of the paper but I actually never see a one of them. Every teenager knows how to feign indifference. My hands don’t shake and nothing gives away my terror. I know that this is about my very survival. If he crosses that line, my life will be over.

He figures out that none of this talking and visual aids are working. Cruelly creative, he tries a different tack. He buys me drugs. I smoke his pot and take his pills but only away from the house. I have to stay frosty and alert when I am home.

One Saturday morning, I hear deep voices downstairs and I go down and sit at the dining room table and listen to my uncle and dad talk. They suddenly get quiet and both of them stare at me in an odd way—it makes me uncomfortable. My uncle looks at my dad and says, “Must be tough living with that.”

My dad shakes his head up and down, and simply replies, “Yeah.”

Then, they both gawk at me again. I look at each one of them, frown, and break the gaze. They move on to something else, and I get out of there as soon as I can, but not before I feel the ground shift under my feet. I wonder why I suddenly feel dirty.

Later that day I complain to my mother. “He won’t leave me alone,” I whine. “Can’t you say something to him? I’m his kid for Christ’s sake.”

She turns on me. “I told you not to walk around like that, what do you expect?”

“What do you mean ‘like that’?”

“Your bathrobe. It’s too short.”

“Then buy me a new one,” I plead.

“We don’t have the money for that,” she tells me and busies herself dusting.

I turn and walk away.

A month later, my mother is at work. I am in the kitchen doing my homework when my father comes in to get a drink of water. He leans with his back against the sink, studies the floor says, "I'm having a hard time keeping my hands off of you."

I put down my pencil and stare at my textbook. So, here it comes. Blood pounds in my temples. For some reason I think of a man who picked me up hitchhiking months earlier. As he drove he told me that he'd picked me up because his daughter had run away and maybe I knew her? Of course I didn't. Sometimes, those of us who hitched rides would be three and four deep, so many of us were on the move all the time. That man loved his daughter and missed her. I had wished I was his daughter.

Softly I tell my father, "If you ever touch me, I will run away and you will never see me again." Was this why she ran away?

"I don't know what to do," he whines.

"Well, then get yourself a girlfriend and leave me the *hell* alone."

He leaves for his AA meeting while I sit at the kitchen table counting tears as they fall onto my notebook. My own father. What had I done that he thought I would have sex with him? I wanted to find out what that thing was and stop myself from ever doing it again. I went upstairs and returned to the kitchen with my bathrobe and threw it away. I would never again leave my room unless I was fully dressed in street clothes. I wondered if I would be white trash my whole life.

He takes my advice and has a girlfriend within a few weeks. Now, I have to deal with the guilt I feel for suggesting it in the first place.

In Victoria Secunda's book, *Women and Their Fathers*, she explains what kind of damage a seductive father does: he destroys his daughter's beliefs, distorts her gut instincts, and devastates her mind, body, and identity. Before all of this, I'd had a hard time trusting anyone, but after he let me know that he wanted to have sex with me, I trusted no one, including myself. My life was an ugly caricature and I knew it. Once I laid down that boundary and he found his girlfriend, the ground shifted again. The slight power I'd had when he was after me was gone. Now, I was a liability because I knew.

AA was a notorious hot bed of needy, dependent women for my father. His affair didn't surface until he went into treatment in Kenosha. My mother was bitter as my father had to make a choice between her and the other woman, who everyone said was fine boned and genteel. So unlike us.

My mother knew that he picked up women in the bars he frequented but he always came home to her. She knew this because of two things: she was often treated for STD's and he'd had the misfortune to hit a tree while drunk. There was a woman in the front seat with him and my uncle and a woman in back. He laughed about it, claimed that the tree had been doing seventy when it hit him, but my mother's face was a dark cloud for weeks after.

Part of his treatment for alcoholism included his having to speak at an open meeting for AA. I was made to go and sat in the crowded room as he told his story and tried to make jokes. He claimed that he always expected to be shot by a jealous husband of one of the women he'd bedded. He made a joke about being drunk and arrested after calling the police on himself when no one else would. If I had expected any kind of

contrite behavior from him, that expectation was soon gone. What had I been thinking? Did I really expect him to get up and talk about how his family had stuck by his side through all his machinations? All I heard was the same übermasculine crowing I'd heard all of my life. My mother died a thousand deaths sitting there listening to his boasting about his sexual prowess, and tales of adventure. She wanted to be seen as the supportive wife as he pretended to turn his life around. She smiled weakly as people, mostly men, came up to congratulate him on his speech, but then there weren't very many women in this AA club. It was more a swingers club than a real, honest AA meeting house.

My father was what is called a "dry drunk." That is, the alcoholic keeps the same repertoires of behaviors, only sober. The hardest part of any AA program is for alcoholics to actually change their approaches to life, to change their thinking, to change *themselves*. That is far easier said than done. Dad was a marvel at pretense and his pretense was sobriety and clear thinking. I was sixteen at the time of this meeting and before I would reach twenty, he would have three major slips.

One of the most difficult things for kids to understand when they have addicted parents is why the children aren't enough to keep them sober. I want to know if an alcoholic thinks about the children left at home. I have to be careful because any direct questioning of my father's actions cause him to angrily accuse me of seeking revenge. Revenge is what "bad" people do. I don't want to be seen as bad so I ask, "Dad, when an alcoholic is drinking, what does he think about his kids?"

He takes a drag from his cigarette and keeps watching TV but asks, “What do you mean?”

“I mean, like, when an alcoholic is drinking and he’s out at the bars all the time, what does he think about his kids then? Does he think about them at all?”

“They’re like pets.”

Dumbfounded, I repeat what he said, “Like pets!”

Surprised, he looks at me and then back at the television, “Yeah. Like pets.”

“What do you mean, ‘like pets’?”

“You know, like fucking pets. Now let me watch TV.”

I turn away saying, “Bow-wow.”

I run upstairs and lie down on my bed. *Like fucking pets.* The more I think about it, the more it makes sense. I think about my brother’s dog chained in the back yard. No one ever does anything with him; he is fed and watered every day but that is it. What more does he need? Years later I will read in a Carlos Castaneda book how the sound of a chained, barking dog is the saddest sound in the world. The dog is chained to a house and each day is the same as the last—much as a man is chained to his life of routine and boredom, the animal is “the nocturnal voice of man” (285). The dog’s needs are met but it’s still chained. *Like pets.*

In the spring of my junior year of high school, I began babysitting for a three-month-old baby named Jennifer. I babysit after school while her mother works second

shift and until the father gets home from his day job. I know as much about babies as I do nuclear fusion and have no business watching this child. The only reason I have this job is because I am a girl and I am a student at our Catholic high school. This is hardly a resume for someone who is going to watch your child but, like so many parents, they are trying to make ends meet and do all that they can. For my part, I think that it can't be too hard to watch a baby; some pretty stupid people manage to raise kids. I can do my homework while the baby sleeps.

Jennifer doesn't sleep as much as I hoped, so I feed her, change her diapers, and prop her up in her baby seat where she gurgles and cooes to her set of plastic keys. Occasionally, I actually pay attention to her but it's safe to say that I don't do a lot to enrich her environment. I play with her like I would play with a puppy. As the days wear on, I get to know her and grow attached to her. She demands little from me and we have lots of quiet afternoons together.

After a couple of months, on a Sunday, her mother calls me up and tells me she won't need me to babysit the oncoming week. Jennifer has died a crib death. She says that the funeral will be later in the week. I tell her that I will be there.

I hang up the phone and stare into space. All of the air has been sucked out of the room and the walls are squeezing in on me. I turn and grab my jacket from the back of the kitchen chair as my mother asks me what has happened. Without seeing her, I tell her that Jennifer has died a crib death and that I won't be babysitting anymore. I quickly leave the house. It is early evening, gray and foggy. I walk, watching my feet as one takes its place in front of the other. At first, I don't cry. This makes no sense to me at

all. How could God take this little baby? What the fuck did she do? Who was next? Hell, anyone could be next. What sense does it make to plan anything for the future when you may not have a future? This is pure, unmitigated evil. Then, I begin to cry.

Long after dark, I return home, emotionally exhausted. I walk straight up to my room without looking at anyone. Soon, my father appears in the doorway.

“No one knows why these things happen, they just do.”

“Yeah, that makes sense,” I say sarcastically. “Why does God take little babies? What did she do?” I plead.

“We don’t know why. That’s just the way it is. We have a certain measure of time and that’s it. We don’t get to see the whole picture; we only see a small part of it. “

“There is no God. And, if there is, fuck him. I’m sick of this shit. Leave me alone.”

When the day of the funeral comes, my friend Patty walks with me to the funeral home. I want the parents to know that I cared: I want Jennifer to know that I cared even if I was a poor excuse for a caretaker. We walk the mile to the funeral home and I steel myself in the doorway. I give my condolences to the parents. I hug them, and Jennifer’s mother steers me towards the casket and then attends other visitors.

Panic and horror hit me. I see a Jennifer-doll is there, lying on white satin in a tiny casket. Even as I perceive this object as a doll I know that it is not a doll. She looks as she did the last time I saw her, only dressed in a white Baptismal dress and frilly, white

bonnet. Her hand is near her mouth as though she'd been sucking on her fist. I turn and hoarsely whisper to Patty how badly I need to get out of there and run out the front door.

I feel as though my feet are tightly bound and run taking baby-steps, gulping air and trying to get the picture of her out of my head. The harder I try to stop it, the more the image comes. I want to weep and scream.

Patty asks me, "Are you okay?"

I swallow hard and softly reply, "No. I'll never be okay again. She looked like a little doll—a beautiful, little doll. I can't take this."

That weekend I drink whatever I can get my hands on, smoke whatever I can find, and wind up on my bedroom floor huffing fingernail polish remover.

My two sisters had died as babies from the Rh factor. One sister had lived a day and the other a week. It was then that my father had turned away from God and refused to attend church.

Just before my fifth birthday, my mother, a week from giving birth to my brother, began to hemorrhage. I stood in the hallway outside her bedroom door as the neighbor lady came out carrying a cake pan containing a sheet sopping in blood. Blood swirled around the pan. As an adult, my mother told me how my father had sat by her bedside in the hospital, crying and begging her not to die. She had lost so much blood that no one knew if she would make it or not, all because she had lifted a diaper pail full of soaking diapers.

Was this how my father and mother turned away from each other? Were they constant reminders to each other all that they had suffered together? Jennifer taught me what it was like to lose a helpless, innocent baby, and all your hopes and dreams for that child. Jennifer wasn't even *my* child yet the horror of losing her still haunts me to this day.

Three years later I am walking around Sears. A mob of people are milling around by the front windows with their kids. I see Jennifer's father first, his back is to me, and I move to go over and greet him. As he turns to his wife who is approaching from the right wielding a comb, I see a little boy in a sailor suit in his arms. They are waiting to have his picture taken. I watch furtively, peeping over the top shelf of Craftsman tools, as she combs the baby's hair. Their eyes crinkle as they smile at each other. Choked up, I turn to leave, deciding not say anything to them, not wanting to spoil the moment. It is enough to know that they have another child, they are happy, and are a family. They had hoped and trusted in the future, even with the loss of Jennifer. Maybe I could, too.

I am nineteen when my phone rings at the A-Center where I work.

"Oh. Hi, Dad."

"I'm not your dad."

"Of course, you're my dad."

"No, I'm not. I'm not your brother's dad, either. You both have different dads."

“Dad! What the hell are you talking about?”

“Goddamnit, listen to me! I’m not your dad; you and your brother have different dads and neither of them is me. I’m going to hunt you all down and kill you!”

He slams the phone down and I fly out of my desk chair to find my mother. I tell some of my father’s AA friends what is going on and they run to find him before he can find us.

My father had thrown me out of the house the winter before. I had nowhere to go but to my mother’s apartment. She took me in but told me I could only stay a few weeks because she couldn’t afford to keep me. I agreed to get out of the cold, but as I nodded my head I wondered where I would go. It never occurred to me to ask any of my friends who hadn’t gone off to college for shelter—I was too used to going it alone and thought that everyone had to do that. After a few weeks of sleeping in my mother’s unheated sun porch, a friend’s roommate was moving out, and I moved in. We all pretended that Dad hadn’t thrown me out; we were, after all, a family. My father knew where my apartment was but I figured he’d go for my mother first.

When I found my mother, she already had my brother in her car. Someone called her and told her what was going on. She told me that it was better if we separated because that way he wouldn’t find all of us together. She said to go and stay at my boyfriend’s parents’ house and then she took off, refusing to tell me where they were going. The next evening I learned how my uncles had found him drunk and passed out by the garage at my grandfather’s house. We all pretended that nothing had happened. We were good at pretending.

Thirty-two years later I am in graduate school and reading freshman compositions. I marvel at how forthright they are about intimate details of their lives. They write about drunken mothers and fathers, abusive stepparents, and all sorts of toil and trouble that they have survived. Some of them break my heart and some of them quite plainly, surprise me. At their age, I was still “protecting” the family and only discussed my childhood in group therapy. It would have never occurred to me to write about these things for college. What really astounds me about these essays is the way they stand up for themselves, especially the young women. They scream at drunken fathers, telling them that they are “losers,” “disgraces,” and “worthless.” They punch them. My eyes widen as I read these things and I wonder why I never did that. Finally, it occurs to me that I have no essays about beatings, drug addicted parents, or incest. These things are too big to be written about and too shameful for the victims. It is one thing to write about a single drunken parent and the effects of that behavior on the sober parent and children but quite another to admit the humiliation of incest or abuse.

That shame and humiliation implies complicity in the abuse. I think about two kids I tried to counsel when I worked with troubled kids. Their mother was schizophrenic and used to beat her daughter and son with rolled up wet towels. Until he was twelve years old and nearly six feet tall, the son hid under the bed any time someone would come to the house. Their mother had screaming fits and chased her children, screeching, with butcher knives. Their home life was pure hell and it was the only life they knew. When their mother worsened (if that was possible), I arranged for them to go to a foster home together because I thought it imperative that they get out of that home quickly. When I told them, the son turned and ran out. The daughter looked at the floor

and scuffed the toe of her shoe. “What?” I asked her, annoyed that they weren’t happy to be getting out of that house.

“If you do this,” she told me, “if you take us away from our mother, we’ll run away and never come back. “

“Why?”

“We can’t leave our mother.” I sighed because I knew what she was saying: I got it.

The devil you know is better than the one you don’t know. That is why I was always so worried about losing one or both of my parents. It is incomprehensible that strangers could be more caring than one or both of your parents. To be able to think that would be to admit to yourself that your parents *don’t* love you and that is truly frightening. If your parents don’t love you, who will? We cling to the belief that if we are better kids, if we can just figure out the pattern of what sets them off, then we can keep things happy. Those kids knew, as I did, how once you enter the foster care system, what little control you have is gone. The system makes you a commodity because it pays people to take care of you, so now you are a thing of monetary value. Home is predictable: the drunken fights, craziness, and beatings are all things you know and can plan for. Foster care is unpredictable, which we imagine has to be worse than what we know.

Our relationship as father and adult daughter is complicated. When my father begins to court a woman, he takes my brother and me to meet her and her kids. He gives us a long list of “don’ts”—don’t swear, don’t bring up the past, don’t talk about life

because these people are nice, middle-class people who don't know what we know. After they are married, his new wife decides that since my father is "happy," he can have drinks with her in the evening. She thinks that we were the cause of his torment and not the other way around. But, one night Dad has a few too many and winds up slapping her and shoving her out of bed with his foot. The cruel part of me laughs and feels vindicated. Still, I stay away and only visit my father at work.

Until the day he died there was a strange nonsexual-sexual tension between us. Instinctively I knew that it came from unplumbed depths, but I still don't know what that was all about and probably never will. We never spoke of what had passed between us that evening in the kitchen.

I had seen enough inside my personal life and outside in the other lives around me to realize that it wasn't me. It never was me. They were as much shaped by the lives and times that they had lived in as I was. I forgave them because it was the only thing I could do for myself and my children. I spent too many years sleepless and hurting over the childhood I never had and got up one morning and decided that enough was enough. Any kid in that house would have been subjected to the same things. I let it go but as I let it all go, I learned how to protect myself and my children from whatever craziness my parents tried to bring into our lives.

My father was incredibly unhappy before he died. He'd met his match in the woman he'd married and she managed to out-cruel him. He got his licks in, but in the end she had mortally wounded him with her manipulations and dominance. It was a mystery to me that he seemed afraid of her. It came down to health insurance: he needed

her health insurance. One Saturday afternoon he lay back in his easy chair to nap and his heart simply quit.

Macrocosms

If I felt small and insignificant at home, out in the world was worse. As I turned my gaze outwards, there was no shortage of bad things to capture my attention. I hated living in the city, and when I could, I would pack up on the weekends and travel around Wisconsin or find someplace nearby with lots of trees and underbrush—a place to relax. I was psychologically brittle but growing stronger.

The early 1970s exposed something of a free drug and sex hangover from the 1960s. As a nation, we were coming to grips with much personal freedom and we were instructed to “let it all hang out.” “Free love,” as it turns out, was hardly free. Woodstock became a symbol of these times but so did Charles Manson. Even though we had new paradigms for a more egalitarian society, they were just ideologies and now the real work was to begin. Adolescents like me were turning up with serious drug problems, which prompted the federal government to fund intervention and outpatient programs. At sixteen, I’d sought out these counseling services and attended weekly one-on-ones and group sessions at the A-Center of Racine. The “A” stood for “Addiction.”

All of us involved in the group therapy sessions had experienced fractured home lives as kids, and some had no contact with their parents at all. Our group sessions were all about fear and protecting ourselves. Most of us kept using, but by the time I was eighteen I was drug free and trying to hold it together emotionally.

Girls who grow up with fathers who are toxic or absent in some way are left with a mystery on their hands. They know little or nothing about men in general. Most of my friends were men because I wanted to identify with men—they had all the power.

Ironically, I felt more at home with them than with women. I did men-things like hiking and camping, often by myself. The only person I ever spoke to about my life in any depth was my therapist. I was clingy and needy in my relationships, but often I would wake up one day and decide it was over and not look back.

Women, it seemed, always found me wanting. I learned this from my mother through her discounting, diminishing, and often cruel behavior towards me. She was so absorbed in her own problems and so in thrall to my father that I was a bother to her. If I pushed it, she would tell me that she hated me and I should leave her alone. I didn't behave like a lady and I was independent like a man.

Once adolescence dawned, there was no peace for either of us. At first, I just took whatever she dished out. She would tell me how beautiful she was when she was my age, stacked and perky, and she asked me why I was lagging behind. I fell short of being a woman. She had shined at it. Life became a battle of wills between us. I wasn't interested in who won or lost; I just wanted to be able to be who I was and do what I wanted to do. Always the ugly duckling, always argumentative, fighting with her was the only way I got attention. What I didn't know: most of what I felt as chronic anger was chronic fear about my shortcomings and my place in my family and the world.

Due to my father's legacy, I dealt with many fears as an adult. I feared independence as much as I feared dependence. I was emotionally guarded. I seemed to be innately assertive but questioned and doubted every decision I made. Through my experiences I began to realize that my fears didn't protect me; they held me back and

impeded my progress. I pushed myself to confront things that scared me, to reach through the flames and grab some life.

I was a maverick in every sense of the word. I was what researchers today call a “controversial child” (Santrock 189). During childhood I was lonely, expected lousy treatment from my classmates and usually got it because of my submissiveness and inability to fight back, but once I left childhood, I behaved pretty much as I wanted because, if I couldn’t please anyone, I might as well please myself. I took up causes and became a political activist who was going to right the wrongs of the world.

I am often embarrassed by my own ignorance. I think back on some of the things that I have done to friends as well as strangers and I wonder what in the hell I was thinking. I am haunted by my cavalier response to a soldier who had been in Vietnam and tried to tell me how the people welcomed the soldiers. I should have been kinder to him because being kind is being humane. Perhaps this is the maturation process; maybe we all look back and see our own Dark Ages. The worst part about it is that each year brings new realizations; it is a long and arduous path to becoming fully human. It is a transformation from a ravenous caterpillar to a butterfly.

I. Race

At thirteen, I walk in the front door at home after school and my father screams at me, “Get in here and shut the door! The niggers have gone crazy and they’re on their way here!”

At each of our front windows, he has placed one or two rifles, locked and loaded. I stand there in front of him looking from windows to rifles to him, my eyes wide. If this dad is afraid, then I am, too, because anything that frightens him must be really bad. After all, what scares the devil?

“They’re marching on Memorial Street. They’re going to riot and come after us. I’m ready for those black bastards, though,” he tells me as he pulls the shade away from the window to peek out.

Saying nothing, I climb the stairs to my bedroom where I look out the windows. I, too, am looking for the black horde that is going to descend upon us at any moment. The streets are deserted—there are no cars or people anywhere. I sigh and lie on my bed to read while waiting for more adult craziness to descend upon me. The murderous plague never arrives and our street remains as white and pristine as it always was.

It was impossible to grow up in the 1960s and not know that great changes were sweeping across our country. These were changes that challenged the images we were fed through television. When I was very small, we used to watch *Amos and Andy* and that was pretty much my experience with black people. There were never any blacks in *Make Room for Daddy*, *Leave It to Beaver*, or *Ozzie and Harriet*. Tonto was the Indian helpmate in *The Lone Ranger*, and the Cisco Kid had his sidekick, Poncho, who always said, “Oh! Cees-co!” but they were in Mexico. Charlie Chan was a smart detective and that, my parents told me, was why some day the Orientals were going to take over the world. Ricky Ricardo in “I Love Lucy” was Cuban, but that was nearly white so he

didn't really count. Later, came *I Spy* and *The Mod Squad* but no person of color was ever in charge. No women were, either.

I had read an article in *Life* about a black man and a white woman who were married. It would be years before I would realize that the article was about miscegenation. To me, in my youthfulness, it was just an article about a mixed race marriage and I had no way of understanding what that couple must have gone through. I just didn't get what the problem was: if she wanted to marry a black man, why did everyone care so much? I didn't understand that the United States had laws against this until they were overturned as unconstitutional in 1967.

My socialization on race was very clear: stay away from anyone who wasn't white, especially men. This was not difficult because I'd never met a black person in my life. There were no black people in our rural parish of wealthy farmers or at my parochial school. Our neighborhood was far from the "bad" neighborhoods, whatever those were. We sometimes skittered through those neighborhoods late at night. They just looked poor. I didn't see anyone beating people up, or knocking women down, things adults in my life talked about.

In my hyper-vigilance, very little was said in our house without my ears stretching down the stairs or around corners. A couple of days after the riot-that-never-was I learned that there was a hierarchy to racism. My father and mother were explaining this to a visitor because they'd had experience with *them*—my father in prison and my mother in the bars.

“If I have to deal with any of them, I’d prefer to deal with a nigger. They’re, at least, loyal. They can be a friend,” my father says.

“Mexicans are the ones who scare me,” my mother adds. “They’ll stab you while they’re smiling in your face. Mexicans are good with knives . . .”

“So are niggers,” my father reminds her.

“Yeah, but not as good as Mexicans. It’s in their blood,” she says.

“Yeah,” my father adds, “you can’t trust a Mexican but you can trust a nigger if he’s your friend.”

I file this away and later ask my mother why this is so. She shrugs and tells me that it is just the way it is. When I ask my father where all the Indians are, he tells me on reservations. I don’t know what a reservation is. But I want to go there.

One Memorial Day, when my friend Ellen and I are sixteen, we attend a local dance held by the Parks and Recreation Department. We dance with the only two black guys. People stare at us but we don’t care because we are rebels. The Civil Rights movement is all around us and we are progressive. We walk back to my house and are comparing notes on how they were different from our usual white boys. As we approach our front porch, where my father is sitting smoking a cigarette, he overhears us and goes ballistic.

He jumps to his feet, eyes wide, hollering, “You danced with *niggers*?”

Ellen and I exchange looks and then I stare at the sidewalk. When Ellen laughs and says, “Well, yeah.” I am horrified. How could I have been so stupid! I should have warned her. She doesn’t know.

“You stay away from niggers, goddamnit! They only want you because you’re white, do you understand me? You’re a prize for them and nothing more. Every nigger wants a white woman and no decent white guy will have anything to do with her after that. Then what will you do?”

I was grounded for three months and forbidden to see Ellen the entire summer. I had lots of time to think. I had never felt like a prize. My father certainly never treated my mother or me as though we were anything special. We were just women and were relegated to a status somewhere below my brother, the kid with the golden penis. No matter how I approached it, this didn’t make sense.

La Raza, the American Indian Movement (AIM), the Civil Rights Movement—I didn’t understand why everyone was so angry and why they hated white people. I knew nothing of real history, only what I’d been taught. How would I know that not being white was to be vulnerable?

At twenty, I start to tend bar at my uncle’s red-neck, country and western, inner-city bar. A lamb among wolves, I get a quick education. One afternoon, I watch as a fine-boned, intelligent, pretty blond woman descends into her alcoholic hell, transformed into a puddle of a human being on a faux-leather stool. My mouth is agape as two bleached-blond women, both built like refrigerators with heads, fight like men because one had called the other “fat.” I stand transfixed as my young black friend, a kind,

gentle, fun-loving guy defends his honor against a racial slur from a skinny, pinched-face white man twice his age. My uncle laughs, even though he likes this cheerful kid as much as I do. “A nigger is, after all, always a nigger,” he says, worried that the red-necked racist would get “cut.” Race and gender relations at the bar were like pebbles washed up on the beach—all mixed up. You just never knew what you would find.

A short, round Mexican man enters the bar and he sits sideways, looking out the front windows. I walk down to him and before I can say anything, he asks, “Do you serve Mexicans here?”

“No,” I tell him, “but we serve pizzas and sandwiches.”

He looks at me and bursts out laughing, his gold front tooth twinkling in the lights. He holds out his hand. “I’m Sidney Lopez. I’ll have a ‘sickle-cell’.”

Stupidly I ask, “A ‘sickle-cell’? What’s that?”

“A Budweiser longneck.”

When I return with his glass and beer, I ask about the nickname.

“Niggers drink Budweisers that’s why we call them ‘sickle-cells.’”

“You don’t like black people?”

Sidney wrinkles his nose at me and slightly shakes his head as he drinks from his glass. I couldn’t be more shocked than if he’d told he didn’t like Mexicans.

I had presupposed that all downtrodden people banded together and understood each other. Hadn’t they all suffered from the same basic humiliations, hurts, and

institutionalized social rejections? It never occurred to me that people who suffered from prejudice and ignorance would practice that same against another group. I assumed that black people, brown people, and red people, as well as women and gays, would hold hands happily singing Kumbaya in the sunset. I had seen Jews and Blacks work together for the common good during the fight for Civil Rights, and I wondered why La Raza and AIM wanted to be on their own. I waited to see if they would all link together because that would be some force to deal with. I am still surprised when confronted with prejudice from people who have suffered from it. It is as though they have not learned a thing from their own suffering.

At fifteen, I'd met an old trapper who taught me about herbal medicines from the wilds. I expanded on his teachings and had a good grasp of European herbalism. One day, someone whom I had treated for gout brought me an article from the Milwaukee Journal about a traditional Ojibway woman who was an ethnobotanist, Keewaydinoquay Peschel, who taught at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. I first met her in her office in the bowels of one of the older buildings there. When I sought her out, I already knew that I couldn't continue on the path that I was on.

We got along well and we learned from each other, though I learned far more from her than she ever could from me. Right from the beginning, Kee surprised me. As she taught me an Anishinaabeg prayer, she explained how this prayer saluted the seven directions and prayed for balance.

“Seven?” I said. “I only know four.”

“Yes, I know,” she gently replied. “You're missing the seventh.”

“We have the four cardinal directions. The fifth and sixth directions are Down and Up. In this way, we honor the Mother Earth and Creator. The last direction, the one you and so many others are missing, is ‘here,’ where you stand—you are your own sacred direction.”

Kee expands on this in her booklet, *Direction We Know: Walk in Honor*, pointing out that Here is always changing with time, place, and life-cycle and it makes relevant all the other directions in our lives. Here is about walking in honor, which is behaving with honor towards oneself, family, community, ancestors, descendants, Mother Earth, and Creator (15). When we honor all of these relationships, we come full circle and we bring honor to ourselves. We are to walk this life with honor and balance between the spiritual above and the physical below. But, the path is narrow and difficult because we have so many human frailties and are easily led astray.

This made sense to me. If everything “out there” is sacred as I often felt in my wanderings in the wilds, then “in here” must be, too. I felt ashamed of my path so far and began to wonder how to begin anew. But, honor is a word that is defined differently by individuals.

Kee was very clear on this. Walking in honor was pretty much the Golden Rule with the cornerstones of respect, tolerance, patience, and a keen sense of integrity of self and others. This all rested upon a base of reverence for all life. Honesty is a refusal to deceive and manipulate; integrity is the state of being in which we uphold trust and meet our responsibilities to self and others; and honor is having regard for one another’s humanity and maintaining the standard of being a true human being.

When I think of walking in honor in the context of evil, it puts it all into perspective. Honor is a kind of “warrior mantra” and always makes me think of the Marines, but it is not about acts of bravery or might. Walking in honor is a construct that we choose to build each day. It is about living in balance, knowing one’s capabilities, and it is looking at our shortcomings without flinching. This is also part of Peck’s definition of evil behaviors because, he tells us, evil is unable to withstand the pain of introspection, of being displeasing to oneself (75).

Unlike the prayers that I grew up with, these new prayers bring a new way of thinking. We did not pray for things or money—the prayers are not requests but prayers of gratitude. Thank you, East for the light, for new beginnings, the warmth and light of the sun; to the South, for the warm winds that bring food for all the tender creatures on Mother Earth, for those creative forces; to the West, for the thunder and lightning that accompanies the life-sustaining rains, wisdom garnered from a life well-lived; to the North, for the time of introspection, rest, and purification until we begin the circle anew. Thank you to Creator for life, to Mother Earth for her succor and sustenance, and thank you for Here, where I stand, puny but actively searching, and please, thank you, that together we keep things in balance.

The prayer said before a meal actively accepts thanks from Creator for our good behavior. Why would the almighty thank *us*? Kee laughed, “Because when we behave as we should, we honor him and he thanks us for that.” There was no smiting, no violence, and no anger. There was only acceptance for an evolving being with human faults. The voice I sometimes heard in my head, she informed me, was my guardian

spirit. She reiterated that the spiritual realm wants to help us and manifests that help in many ways.

One area where she wasn't much help to me was men. She was as mystified by many of their actions as I was. She shared with me her own wandering path with men and the myriad of ways she and her children had suffered from their violence and anger, beginning with her rape at the tender age of thirteen. Her mother had sent her to sell at the local market where she saw a red-haired man. She looked sadly at me as she said, "I'd never seen red hair before—I thought he was a Manitou so I did as he demanded. What did I know?"

Long ago, when I first had learned of my Blackfoot ancestors, the thing I most wanted to do was a vision quest. I wanted that spiritual floodgate to open, to find a way of making peace with a world that seemed filled with multi-layers of evil and cruelty. I wanted some kind of a working understanding of the things I saw around me so I could stop being afraid. It wasn't that I was paralyzed as much as I just wasn't moving forward. Kee was going to help me with this, but life got in the way.

I regard Kee as one of the great teachers of my life and regret that I was not evolved enough to take full advantage of what she taught me and could have taught me. She built for me a spiritual paradigm that fostered growth and creativity, that wasn't paralyzing in its rules and regulations, and was joyful as opposed to frightening. It isn't an easy path because it cuts between two rejecting worlds, the white and the Native. Native Americans resent white people meddling in their spiritual worlds and white people find the ideology "weird."

Kee was not color-blind and often made remarks about “white men,” but it was usually within the context of the abuses of the planet, women, or children. Her first allegiance was always to the Mother Earth. She was color-blind in the people she took into the Drum, and she had a profound impact on many people’s lives. In the intervening years since Kee’s death in 1999, I have seen more intergroup and exogamous racism than I can handle. But, I was beginning to view these things not so much as in the context of race but in the context of class. Off reservation, I heard our local tribe referred to as the “fucking Indians” so often that I began to wonder if that was their tribal name. All of the things the non-Indians accused the Indians of, usually drunken, abusive behaviors, were manifested in both groups. No one group corners the market on social problems, or pain and suffering. Everyone committed the error of attributing bad traits as something fundamental to the individual or individual group and not to the social forces that give rise to those behaviors. I wondered what would happen if we took a homogenous group such as two hundred Finns like those who populate most of the U.P. and put them on a reservation, a closed and isolated community, for three or four generations without jobs and little hope.

I realized that my life paralleled many of my Indian friends’ lives. We grew up immersed in alcoholism, abused and neglected in our fractured homes, and as adults, manifested many of the same traits of adult children of alcoholics. It was more about class and the life chances we were born into. Race entered into the mix through institutionalized racism and white privilege, while gender was a factor with male privilege.

Eventually, I did a vision quest. I put ashes on my face to be pitiful, stayed in the woods, and went for three days without food or water. No spiritual floodgate opened. I experienced a profound quietness. Our bodies become peaceful when they have nothing to chew on. The Northern Lights were colorful and bright each night, and I watched as they danced and pulsed across the northern sky. I reported what I had gone through to my spiritual mentor at the time and he seemed satisfied with the results. I traveled to his home where he performed a naming ceremony for me and my second son. When we got there, he was agitated and unhappy about our being white. I wasn't sure where all of this came from because he'd known that from the very beginning of my two year relationship with him. It wasn't as though I could hide it. He named us but was grossly unhappy about it. I felt bad for falling short once again and wondered why he continued. I felt tainted by my whiteness.

A few years after this, I met another spiritual leader and he performed a divination that bowled me over in its directness. He explained our prejudices as "bad spirits." When someone is discriminated against and reacts negatively, he or she takes in that bad spirit and gives it a good home. When they brood, the bad spirit "feeds" on their resentments and anger, and grows stronger. It wants to multiply. Then, when prejudice is acted out, that spirit has the opportunity to "jump" into the new person who is being discriminated against and feed on their bad feelings. Bad spirits multiply like the concentric circles from a pebble tossed into a pond. Some people hearts, he told me, are so eaten out from feeding bad spirits that they are just shells walking around without any trace of humanity left in them. However, if that person is inner directed, the bad spirit

will eventually starve to death because it has no bad energy to live on and the cycle ends there. I want to be like that.

I think about this teaching for a decade. At first, I dismiss it as superstition but it doesn't go away; it keeps coming back and scaring me. There is no doubt in my mind that he believes this in its entirety. He sees the bad spirits as metaphysical black slugs that enter through our ears and eyes and then exit our mouths through words, and our hands through actions. It is only when I think of these things as a hideous metaphor that the concept becomes real.

In 2001, the pan-Amerindian paradigm that I have followed most of my adult life, I regretfully and painfully discard. Race is too big of a multi-faceted problem for me, and I am tired of being a tiny mouse where elephants dance. I am tired of being called a "wannabe" and a "twinkie" by the Native Americans I come in contact with and a race-traitor and "squaw-woman" by the non-Indians. Both groups choose to see is how we are different; they don't want to see the ways in which we are the same.

Still I think about this because in all my travels I have never met the typical Native American, or the typical Black Person. There is no "The Gay Man" or "The Lesbian Woman." I am not "The Average White Woman." All I have ever met are people just trying to make their way through life. I have met Black people who can't jump and white people who can, Native Americans who don't like fry bread or venison, and gay men who couldn't decorate an outhouse. I have interacted only with complex human beings who defy stereotypes and shake off what they are told they are supposed to be.

I learn more about prejudice, sexism, and racism from all walks of life, all races, both sexes (and those in-between) and all combinations of these things. Social psychology refers to this as “in-group/out-group bias” which hardly covers it. I learn about honkies, crackers, bull-dykes, queers, breeders, apples, twinkies, gringos, rag-heads, fags, Uncle Toms, slopes, greasers, beaners, bird shits, micks, dog-eaters, zebras, polacks, and wannabes. We use a myriad of names to disparage another human being whom we perceive as being different from us. I spend a lot of time wondering why we don’t celebrate our differences and our idiosyncrasies because that is where our creativity lives. The bad spirits have plenty to eat.

II. Gender

I watched women on TV burn their bras and demand rights as I teetered on adolescence. I couldn’t picture my mother, her sisters, or either of my grandmothers doing such a thing. Freud, still considered a genius, had even asked, “What do women want?” If Freud didn’t know, who did? Someone should have asked the women because they were being particularly vocal at this time.

My father would laugh at the news, “Look at those lesbians!” They weren’t *real* women because everyone knew that real women wanted to stay home and take care of their families. My mother and a few of my aunts worked as did their husbands. My mother had me to do the housework while my little brother was assigned nothing. Men did not do housework. My father mowed the lawn once in a while but his contribution

was whatever he was willing to part with from his paycheck. It didn't occur to me that this arrangement was unequal.

As I grew older, my mother began to tart me up. I hated it and cringe each time I look at my eighth grade graduation picture. She steered me towards a neon-bright pink and orange, ruffled, low-cut, skin tight dress. In the picture, I am plainly uncomfortable, perched on the edge of our couch with my equally bright purse sitting next to me. My hair is ratted and put up high into a French Twist and my face looks paint-by-number: bright blue eyelids, stop-sign cheeks, my mouth a bloody slash. This was the world of the women, and I didn't want any part of it. I planned on getting a horse, packing all my stuff in the saddle bags, and riding all over the country, like the cowboys did. Growing up put an end to that. Clint Eastwood never had tampons in his saddle bags.

I can hardly pretend that after I left my father's home and moved in a straight line to understanding my role in the world. I can't say that I wasn't abused by men as I grew into an autonomous, adult woman. It was a long, painful process, one wrought with paradoxical behaviors. As much as I feared men, I was drawn to them. Eventually, I became entangled in a sadistic/masochistic relationship. In our culture, we tend to think of sadism and masochism only in sexual terms, but many unhealthy relationships deserve this label when one partner is in thrall to the other. For two years I lived a replay of my parents' life. It was as though I had to go to a place so low that the only direction open to me was up. Something inside me drew me up and out. Because of the toxicity of that relationship, I understand how subtly abuse begins and slowly progresses. I grasp how people become habituated to maltreatment, don't properly identify it, and don't believe that could happen to them. I comprehend how my mother, with two small children and

no place to go, was trapped with my father. I think about the psychological and emotional toll on her.

When I am sixteen, the police find a headless woman's torso on Seven Mile Road. I am eighteen when they find the young woman sacrificed at the 16th Street beach. After each occurrence of violence against women, we lope back and forth to our cars feeling like springbucks in the hidden lion's gaze. For our own safety, we work hard not be out alone at night, and we try to travel in groups. When we are caught alone in the open, we skulk along trying to be invisible. Time passes, we relax, and forget. We grow careless. I am twenty-four when they find a dog chewing on a woman's hand and another hand and some fingers in a brown lunch bag by the railroad tracks on Washington Avenue. The perpetrators of these murders have never been identified. It is dangerous to be a woman in ways that men can never understand.

As little girls we learn that our power is our attractiveness. If the looks aren't there, then we might compensate by being overly capable or scholastic to give us a sense of self. Being seen and having those images of self reflected back to us is an important part of our development. In social psychology, Cooley refers to this interaction as the "looking-glass self" or social mirroring. Cooley puts emphasis on the emotional quality of our feelings about ourselves as reflected in the eyes of others. George Mead, in his symbolic interactionist theory, elaborates on the cognitive aspects of learning about ourselves through the reflections from others. Thus, Cooley's theory is about how we feel about ourselves while Mead's theory is about socialization. This is one way how we all learn about our society and culture, and how we act accordingly (Brown 83, 84). Women are caught in a double-bind. We need to be seen for who we are, but that tends

to become overshadowed by the way we look. We can't see others as individuals if we can't find our true selves. The consumerist focus of our culture constantly sends us messages of all the ways we fall short of the Golden Mean, and all of those messages are about our looks instead of how we develop ourselves as individuals.

Ask any woman over forty in our culture and she will have at least one story of being invisible, discounted, and/or ignored by the people she interacts with every day. Some older women find themselves divorced after many years of marriage when their husbands trade them in for a new, young trophy wife. Our youth and male-oriented culture is phobic about older women. Many older women try to compensate by looking and acting younger. With each passing year, I find that I am fading from view and growing less visible except to women of my own age. However, I have been invisible before, and I don't mind. It means I am unhampered by expectations and have more mobility to do whatever I want.

After high school, I work at the A-Center as a paraprofessional under the same government program in which I had been an outpatient. There, I wallow in self-inflicted human misery, others' and my own. We treat all chemical addictions and I believe the in-patient counselors are gods.

Two years later, I am the video technologist. Videotaping patients is just beginning to be used as a diagnostic and treatment tool, and we are exploring ways it can be used to help a patient detach from their ego games by seeing themselves as others see them: social mirroring.

I am directed by Suzanne, the Counseling Director, to surreptitiously videotape one of our female alcoholic in-patients. Now in her forties, the patient had been Miss Racine in the 1950s, and I am given the patient's coronation picture to put into the corner of the frame. Round as a pumpkin, heavily made-up, and ravaged by her lifestyle, I film her as she greets people, moving from table to table, still Miss Congeniality, for the in-house group meeting. I film her, drawing a sharp contrast between what she is now and what she was then.

To my horror, the counselor demands that the tape be shown to the entire assembly. I balk and she pointedly tells me to do my job. I play the tape and the horrified woman breaks down in tears, publicly shamed and humiliated. Other inpatients run to comfort her, glancing angrily back at us. I watch the scene unfold, and I wonder what has been accomplished. It slowly dawns on me that I have done a terrible, cruel thing. The focus was not on *who* she could be today, it was on *what* she'd been in the past and (Ha! Ha!) could never be again. What was the sense of that? It was evil to try to destroy her like this.

The director takes one look at my face and quickly justifies why this had to be done. The counselors couldn't break through her defenses, and if they were to help her, those defenses had to come down. I busy myself with cords, papers, and anything else I can put my hands on. I can't look at her. If I look at her, my white-hot anger will turn her to ashes. I shut off the machinery, and pick up my coat. I think about the levels of cruelty I have witnessed and been subjected to in the name of treatment. Cruelty is a big part of why we are dysfunctional, so I didn't see how it can make anyone better. I am ashamed at my part in this.

I think about Suzanne as she stands in front of me. I look behind her into her past and I see all the suffering she went through because she is an unattractive woman. I can almost feel the discrimination and humiliation she most likely suffered as a masculine lesbian. But, her suffering hasn't softened her angles; it has sharpened them. Clearly, she attacked this woman to attack beauty, to prove once and for all that her intellect trumps the easy doors that beauty opens.

Finally, I glare into her eyes. Her tiny, mean teeth are bared in the grimace that passes for a smile, and her sniggering, nasal laugh echoes in my ears. I hate everything she stands for. I suddenly hate my life here. Who have we ever helped? Our rate of recidivism is laughable, and documents have been doctored for government funding. A house of cards glued with lies.

Most of all, I hate myself. I don't want this anymore. I don't want to hurt people who've been hurt all their lives by those around them. There is more than enough pain to go around without adding to it. I don't say any of these things to her, though. Intellectually superior and glib, she could emotionally murder me—she knows all the things in my file, too. So, I do the only thing I can do. I look at her and say, "I quit."

After two years of outpatient treatment and two years of working there, I walk out the door and never return. I'm so tired and overwhelmed by life that I go home and sleep for hours. I grieve losing this support system, but from that day on I vow that I will never again be involved in hurting another human being for "their own good." The director's cruelty was a sharp spear that pierced that woman's heart and mine in the process. We would not do what we had done to her to any of the swaggering, overweight, cartoonish

Marlboro Men we deal with on a regular basis. No, fading looks and airs were the special “frailings”—frailties and failings—of women.

In 2006, I take a psychopathology class in which we read *Seeing Both Sides: Classic Controversies in Classic Psychology* by Scott Lilienfeld. I am particularly interested in the chapter entitled “Should electroconvulsive therapy be used to treat depression?” Lilienfeld explains how electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) was first used in 1938. The very first patient had screamed not to be shocked again but the two doctors continued anyway, presumably for the patient’s own good. He cites how mental institutions, institutions like the Waupun Hospital for the Criminally Insane where my father was, used ECT as a “weapon of control” (392). But, what really chills my blood comes from the argument written against ECT by Peter Breggin. Here, I find that Breggin has reviewed the records of the 2,500 patients who have received shock therapy in California in the year of his writing this article, 1991. More than two-thirds of them are women, most of them elderly women. I want to read about this firsthand and not in a textbook so I track down Breggin’s book *Toxic Psychiatry*.

In the chapter, “Shock Treatment Is Not Good for Your Brain,” is the subsection “ECT and Women,” where Breggin cites a 1988 report by Carol Warren. Women were shocked deliberately to erase their memories. Unable to remember their problems or their children, they were then “clean slates,” as far as their husbands were concerned. Warren quotes one woman as saying, “Shock treatment is a helluva way to treat marital problems—the problems involved both of us” (200). As if that isn’t bad enough, in “Making Peggy Into Belinda,” Breggin writes about H.C. Tien who “reprogrammed a woman into a more docile mate” using ECT. Well, *that* had to be the dark ages, I

thought. According to Breggin: “it was reported in detail in the November 1 and November 15, 1972, issues of “Frontiers in Psychiatry,” a Roche Laboratories free handout sent to all psychiatrists in the country” (201). He tells how family psychiatrist Tien shocked an unhappy Peggy, stripped her of her personality and then reprogrammed her with the help of a relative. To signify these changes, Peggy changed her name to Belinda.

Why did she agree to this? Peggy had wanted to leave her husband because she no longer loved him, he was never home, and he would beat her [in front of her children] (201). I am compelled to put brackets around “in front of her children” because the beating of her in and of itself is apparently not sufficient reason; it is only reason enough when it is done in front of the children. Because her husband threatened to take her children away from her if she divorced him, she agreed to the ECT treatments. She was reduced to being bottle-fed by her husband who, incidentally, was the “relative” who reprogrammed her. Now, Peggy-turned-Belinda is in a stable, presumably loving marriage and Tien labeled his methodology “ELT—Electricity Love Therapy.” Clearly, to be a woman is to be vulnerable. Especially when something is for our own good.

My father becomes obsessed with serial killers and he gives me books to read. I become obsessed by these stories, too, and I learn about Ed Gein, Ted Bundy, Charles Manson, and all the other serial killers. My father is particularly taken with Jeffrey Dahmer. He writes him a letter telling him the good service he has done to mankind in killing “the queers.” He sends him money.

I read these books to try to ferret out how their minds work, and what the common threads are because I am still haunted by those dead women in Racine. Sometimes I read things that remind me of my father and I wonder. But overall, I see hideous, predatory monsters that are human only in form and most of them contracted these bad spirits when they were young. I think about a scale of evil with these sociopaths at one extreme. Still, I understand how many of them got to be the way they are. The child of an addicted prostitute, Charles Manson was shuffled from one abusive foster home to another, and lived more of his life in jail than out of it. He tells us at his trial, "You made me." I don't excuse his choices because so many people of bad circumstances don't hurt other people, but I grasp the ways in which our social system failed him. I appreciate that his life was all about scale, how the things that were done to him during his childhood were evil just as his actions would be later in his life. He was treated like a thing as a child, and went on to manipulate and deceive people as an adult. What was done to him, he did to others. I revisit Zimbardo's definition of evil: "knowing better but doing worse" (*Lucifer* 5). Too often, it seems, evil against "innocent others" causes them to grow up to be destroyers.

In Dahmer's case, his murderous homosexuality was applauded by my father. One of Dahmer's victims had escaped and begged the police for help. The officers dismissed it as a domestic dispute between "queers" and left him. Clearly, not meeting our cultural definition of what a man should be is also to be vulnerable. This is a new form of sexism to me. I begin to understand that men are locked into a gender-specific set of behaviors just as women are. It often seems to me that we are all out to get each other. This, too, is part of my father's legacy because he knew, in his paranoia, that

someone is always out to get us; some *vampire* is always waiting around the corner to suck us dry. His was a world of “dog-eat-dog”—some worlds are like that. I don’t want to live in that world.

I find that trust is the keystone of a civilized society. In the simple act of walking down to our mailbox to get the mail, I trust that one of my neighbors is not going to shoot or attack me. We trust our parents and spouses to be civil to us and foster our growth as individuals. We trust with our family and friends that we are accepted for who we are as part of the definition of those two relationships. Extend that idea of trust to a doctor, a dentist, a lawyer, the local, state and government officials. Our largest social institutions such as the banking system, governmental regulatory commissions, and medical systems are all based on trust. Trust makes it all work. When that trust is shattered, it all breaks down. I have no doubt that it is evil to shatter people’s trust, if only because it takes away our well-being and when we lose that, we start to be afraid. When we live in fear, we lose sight of hope. But worse, when we live in fear, we start to look for someone to blame.

Epilogue: Where I Stand

The question “Who gets to tell the story?” is said to be about who gives a story meaning and perspective. Storytellers try to lead us where they want us to go, but it is the listener who gives it meaning and perspective, who processes the story through a unique sieve of experience and thought.

We often hear how what is done to us in childhood is reenacted in our adult lives. Adults who are molested as children sometimes grow up to be pedophiles; children who grow up in homes with domestic violence often become victimizers or victims. Certainly many children who grow up in alcoholic homes often become alcoholics. Maybe this is because it is what we are used to and most comfortable with. Like Sisyphus, we keep repeating that cycle—keep pushing that rock uphill only to have it roll back down on us. It is as though we strive for a different outcome and are chronically trying to rewrite our history with our parents.

I grew up with evil and saw it for what it was: sad, desperately fearful, and unbelievably alone. Incomprehensibly alone to anyone who knows what it is to be truly connected to another human being. If the time comes to reconnect for many of the middle-aged sociopaths, the swath of pain and exploitation that they have cut is too wide for anyone to bridge. Those caught in the reaping limp along as best they can.

As I did my research on what my chances were of becoming a true human being with my background, I found that, according to the experts, my chances were grim. If we don't have those unconditional love connections as we grow up, we don't learn the mitigating power of love and acceptance as it relates to our relationships with ourselves

or with other people. Depressed, I looked for people who had made it. There weren't many. I found that people whom we consider successful in our society often have personal lives of serial marriages, unhappy and self-destructive children, and a whole host of personal demons. This made me feel even worse because if they couldn't fight their way through, how would I?

I thought about the myth of Narcissus. Narcissus was so in love with himself that all he could do was peer into a pool of water at his own reflection, where he tried desperately to connect with that reflection until he died. He could see no flaws in himself. Worse, Narcissus had someone who loved him, Echo, whom he spurned. She lived in the peripherals of his vision, echoing him, instead of being fully seen and accepted for who she was. Anyone who has loved a narcissistic individual will recognize the inability of the narcissist to fully comprehend another individual as being a separate individual. It is a tragedy for the narcissist who is unable to truly love and experience the way it broadens our lives. For those who love a narcissist, there is the dawning horror that they don't really exist somehow. Narcissists are mystified by other people and demand that their partners feel what they feel, believe what they believe, and worship them as much as they do. A relationship with a narcissist is only an echo of what love can be. I realize that the constant search for what is wrong, different, and bad in us is the flip side of Narcissus's malady.

The shelves of self-help books in every bookstore attest to our insecurity and lack of confidence in our ability to be fully human. The day that I decided that I would be a "character," that being different isn't a bad thing, is the day I set myself free. I got rid of my self-help books and ended my narcissistic gazing. With a new focus, I am able to

look around me and hear Echo's call of love from the people around me. And, more importantly, I no longer see them as a reflection of me or on me. I celebrate individuality. It is no accident that my husband and friends are former ugly ducklings.

A Sufi friend of mine stopped me in my tracks one day by asking me if I've ever considered that maybe, just maybe, we choose our parents for whatever lessons our higher soul-selves need. That's as good as any explanation that I've ever heard. That concept took the responsibility for my life out of the hands of my past and put it right into present: it was not my mother and father who stood in my way; it was me. After all, if I chose my parents and the life we lived was for our soul-growth, then what we do with our lives from this day forward is entirely up to us.

Another thought that I pondered at great length came straight from the mouth of Christ: the yardstick that we measure others by is the same yardstick we will judge ourselves by. This didn't take root until I noticed two things about human behavior. One is projection. You can tell a lot about a person by what they project onto other people. My father always thought that it was a "dog-eat-dog" world, but he was the one who couldn't reach across the chasm of self and didn't have genuine feelings for people. When someone tells me that they believe people are basically evil and that evil is human nature, I wonder what is in their hearts to make them feel this way. Jung expounds on this concept of projection as an unconscious function of the shadow: "Projections change the world into the replica of one's own unknown face" (9). Jung, like Peck, instructs us that the only way for us to understand this is to engage in a little self-criticism of our true feelings by owning our feelings and stop putting them out onto other people.

The second thing is that people who are hard on themselves are hard on other people in the same ways. This is related to projection because we project our internal dialogue out onto the world, but if many of us would just be gentler with ourselves and more accepting of our fallible humanity, then we would be gentler with other people. As Eric Hoffer tells us:

“The remarkable thing is that we really love our neighbor as ourselves: we do unto others as we do unto ourselves. We hate others when we hate ourselves. We are tolerant toward others when we tolerate ourselves. We forgive others when we forgive ourselves. We are prone to sacrifice others when we are ready to sacrifice ourselves. It is not love of self but hatred of self which is at the root of the troubles that afflict our world.”

We don't hear enough about those of us who grow up not to repeat what was perpetrated upon us or the behaviors we saw modeled. Or, those who start repeating the model of their home lives and then through the grace of intervention, change their lives and rise like the Phoenix nurtured by the ashes of their lives.

I was one of the lucky ones. Things were put in my path to help me understand how fear is at the base of just about everything that ails us psychologically and emotionally. Fear isolates us from our own humanity.

Peck points out how we tend to become what we hate. We aren't born hating: it is a twisted child of fear. In the twisted logic of Nazi ideology, the German people were victimized by the Jews. They polluted the country and hoarded its wealth. In Nazi free-floating angst, the German people focused on a concrete “other” to fear. Once the

threatening “other” is identified, it is a small step to justify any means to protect one’s group.

Kristen Monroe, in her work, “Cracking the Code of Genocide,” discusses and illustrates six psychological aspects of people that determines whether they will act as persecutors, bystanders, or as rescuers. Even though this study focuses on Nazi Germany, by extension, all of these factors are important in everyday behaviors, in everyday heroes, persecutors, and bystanders.

The first aspect is our self-image. Monroe believes this to be the most important indicator of wartime behavior, and I believe it to be a strong indicator of everyday behavior. Rescuers exhibit a strong sense of our common humanity and see themselves as a tiny part of the whole. Bystanders see themselves as puny, powerless, and lean towards fatalism. Persecutors, who in Monroe’s study were active Nazis, saw themselves as victims, believing they were under various attacks which threatened their well-being and way of life. They viewed their actions as being necessary pre-emptive strikes to protect themselves and their communities.

Identity is what compels individuals to make the choices they make, and this in turn reveals their ethical perspectives. All three groups reported that they had “no choice” in the list of no-options they carried with them. Rescuers felt and believed that they had to help because other human beings were threatened. Bystanders stood by because they felt there just was nothing they could do as individuals within a huge political machine, and the genocidal people were simply protecting themselves. Rescuers located control inside and believed that one person can make a difference, and that they

were that one person. For the Nazis and the bystanders, the locus of control was external, outside of them—they were just cogs in the machine and could do nothing because Hitler’s rise to power was predestined.

Individuals’ worldview of themselves in relation to others and the world at large is important because people behave according to their worldview: this is what we believe is normal. One bystander explained how she could not hide Jews because the household help would find out and one had to have hired help. This was normal and appropriate for her, and born of her view of the world in living “the good life” (719). In contrast, the rescuers’ idea of what constituted “the good life” was centered on other people. One rescuer pointed out, “You have not only to not do what is wrong. You have to do what is right” (720). He then went on to explain how life is a gift, a trust, and carries responsibilities, all of which, for him, are about valuing human lives. The Nazi worldview was one of historical forces that could not be hindered or prevented.

We live our values according to how important they are to us, and whether or not they are a strong part of our sense of self (core values) and our worldview. Everyone has an ethical perspective. Genocidal people do not see themselves as evil actors or as insensitive to the suffering of others. What they lack, as well as the bystanders, is a core value of the sanctity of life. Not one of the Nazis or the bystanders interviewed so much as hinted that human life is sacrosanct. It was not on their personal cognitive menus. In contrast, this is what Monroe writes about the rescuers:

All the rescuers interviewed had one value at the foundation of their ethical system, whether or not this ethical system is consciously held or is merely an implicit part of who they are. That value is the sanctity of life.

Rescuers consistently mention this in their discussion of the Holocaust. This core value expressed itself in the puzzled response that ran like a *leitmotif* when rescuers explained why they risked their lives to save strangers: “But what else could I do? They were human beings, like you and me.” (723)

It is this expression of universality that strikes a chord. We are human beings, like “you and me.” Even when everything around them told them that they were wrong, they still maintained this core value because it is part of their identity, and it compelled them to act to save lives. Ironically, based in their own humanity and the humanity of others, rescuers consistently refused to dehumanize the Nazis. They only wanted to know what gave rise and continues to give rise to them.

If the rescuers’ focus was on the macrocosmic level, the Nazis’ focus was on the microcosmic. They were focused on their families, their fatherland, and the greatness of their far-seeing patriarch, Hitler. There was no room for “outsiders.”

Personal suffering was an unanticipated factor. Personal suffering in the rescuers’ background caused them to be sensitive towards others, and was part of what enabled them to be rescuers. Compare that to the bystanders and persecutors who felt vulnerable and fearful, which in turn, led to being more defensive, and increasing their focus on ingroup-outgroup differences.

For the persecutors, the Nazis, the individual categorization system was highly ethical and allowed for the reclassification of “the other.” It is here that we see how a genocidal mind works. First and foremost, genocidal people firmly believe that they are the people under attack. A young Nazi and an elderly Nazi related how Jews are

fundamentally different from Aryans, have no culture of their own, and because they own all of the media, it was they who crucified Hitler for his different ideas. They claimed it was the Jews who developed AIDS and e-coli. Those others, those Jews, invented this Holocaust myth. It is in this manner that the way is paved to dehumanize any “other” and justify their mistreatment.

In Rwanda, the Hutus felt victimized by the Tutsi who had a socially-constructed superior status and so had to be eliminated. And, as we now see, factions of the Muslim faith feel persecuted and believe they must make pre-emptive strikes against the unbelievers who could stamp them out as was done in Bosnia. In the minds of these groups, their genocidal behaviors are the spawn of zero-sum thinking, dragging them down into the most basic and fundamental need to survive by scapegoating and killing the “other.” Hate is born from the fear of not having our most basic needs met; hate replaces the feelings of helplessness with feelings of power.

Just as Zimbardo claims and as the rescuers in Monroe’s study also point out, this brand of evil is situational, and the roots of genocide can be found anywhere. In Germany, it began as identifying Jews as vermin and cockroaches. And, I remember in my lifetime references to “gooks,” slopes,” “ragheads,” and “camel jockeys.” Once the labels are applied, objectification and dehumanization is completed and the out-group is “other.” Foreign and exotic, the other who is threatening what is rightfully ours must be eliminated. As one rescuer commented: “I finally realized, every time you see the monster, you basically are looking in the mirror” (724).

Social psychology is rife with studies on why people don’t help each other more. They have found that our best chance of getting help is when there is only one person.

When there is more than one, we tend to stand around waiting for “someone” to help and not realizing that we are each a “someone.” It is called the diffusion of responsibility; a scenario of chronic psychological buck-passing. As the interviews with the bystanders illustrate, we sometimes hide behind wide-eyed innocence and smallness—but, what can I do; I am only one tiny, little person in this big cog of a wheel. I think of a quote from Martin Luther King:”In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”

I used to believe that our religions could save us from ourselves. But, how can religious paradigms save us when the sacred texts of the three book-based religions are filled with in-group/out-group conflicts and give detailed instructions on who deserves to be stoned and who deserves to live. Yet, all three of the book-based religions also teach *against* murder and intolerance. I am mystified that people believe a tremendous creative force like God can be captured between the covers of books. Clearly, some chapters seem to be missing.

It was as though I discovered a life waiting to be born when I discovered Jung. To my detriment, I had marched to my own drum. Sometimes, it beat pretty well but at other times there was no rhythm, just noise. What I could understand of Jung helped me to organize my thoughts.

Jung is full of rich and varied symbolism that is somehow not-symbolism. His works are both noetic and numinous, and I understand only the things that draw me to him. I study the anima/animus; I believe in the collective unconscious. I experience synchronicity in my life and observe it in the lives of others. I see how often we get exactly what we need, and not what we think we need or want. I understand dreams as

dreams—windows to the unconscious. But, most of all, I grasp the shadow, seek it out and embrace it. I spend my free time with shadow people in the underworld, the world we as a society try to hide from ourselves. I meet people wandering in their own lives: hookers, junkies, ex-junkies, ex-cons, pimps, alcoholics, violent bikers, and all types of people that my parents would not want me to associate with. I am a person my parents would not want me to associate with.

During my days, I go to the other side, to the visible overworld, and work with lawyers, doctors, judges, and other professional people, not as an equal, but as a servant. Because I am unimportant, they reveal their true selves in their interactions with me and with their peers. I am invisible. I nonchalantly stand in the corners, waiting for them to beckon for me, but I am really a fat, greedy spider watching their darksides unfold, chuckling at their pomposity and feeding on their faults.

What is apparent in the underworld is hidden in the overworld : the addictions, the lack of true connections to other human beings, and the necrophilia which is manifested in their dress, cars, and homes—the symbols of their achievements and their value as human beings. They adhere to the Rule of Law but not to the spirit of the law. They mow down people like me, grim reapers all, deciding much of our fate in these private rooms, discussing their clients as though they are interchangeable body parts. In time, one is brought down by his racism on the bench, two die young—one of a heart attack because he could never get enough to eat, and the other because he could never get enough gin to drink. Still another has his Ponzi scheme revealed—he has been stealing from his family and friends and is disgraced in the court he once lorded over.

What is apparent in the overworld is hidden in the underworld: the code of honor kept by street people united by poverty, the crude intellects that have not been shaped and honed by education but through insight and street-savvy, and the creativity inherent in building a life in a world where one is not welcome. Derek, whose intelligence was off the charts and was an artist of ethereal talent, overdosed on heroin. Steve, recovering from cocaine addiction, bought his mother a single red rose one Friday afternoon as a symbol of his gratitude and love for her because she never stopped believing in him. That Sunday, a drunk driver ran a stop sign, hitting the vehicle that Steve was riding in. He died before they could get him to the emergency room at St. Luke's hospital a half-block away. I grieved many people in their turns, some lost to their real deaths and others to figurative deaths. And, I wondered how these lives could have been preserved. Why didn't these two worlds see each other? Weren't they the flip sides of the same coin? One lived in the light, reflecting goodness and wholeness, while the other lived in the dark, broken, yet each possessed the substance of the other.

I laughed as those men of position and power fell. I shouldn't have, because they are victims of their own follies just like me. Whenever someone prominent has a great fall, we take great delight in it. I watch the news to find out what is going on in the world and they are reporting on the Britney Spears' meltdown. This can't be the news, I think, but it is. We like feeding on famous faults because we envy them their position. We don't claim envy in our culture, we prefer the softer, better understood jealousy but we are envious. Envy is more pernicious and connotes smallness, a "looking up" towards someone who betters us. It is this feeling of diminishment that causes us so much pain,

not measuring up and receiving the attentions we think we are due. It is envy that makes us want to smash and destroy what we can't have.

When I worked as a dealer at our local casino, a new woman dealer came to work there that made all the rest of us ladies feel raggedy. Buxom, blond, and beautiful with big, green eyes, and a tiny waist, Carolyn became the object of everyone's envy. Men envied her because she shunned them as sexual partners, and women envied her because of her attractiveness. No matter what she did, she couldn't win. Hilariously, I consoled myself that I was the smart one. I had studied envy so I knew what I was doing and as long as I wasn't hurting her, it was okay. One woman in particular did her great harm through rumors and gossip. When this woman came to me with her stories, I told her that I did not want to hear these things because they had nothing to do with me. So great were her defense mechanisms against feeling diminished that I made a life-long enemy that night. It wasn't that I was defending beauty as much as I wasn't on board with her gossip. If I wasn't with her, I was against her. So, it goes with envy and striving to feel powerful once again.

It is Melanie Klein, a neo-Freudian object relations therapist, from whom I learn about primeval envy. Object relations theory is the basis for attachment theory, our way of relating to important people in our lives. Mother, to a baby, is an object of love and hate. Klein tells us that baby's mind "is linked up with everything he experiences—good and bad alike" (Love 307). When the baby's needs are satisfied, mother is good, and when the baby is frustrated, mother is bad. This struggle of love and hate sounds a lot like many adult relationships.

Klein explains the differences between envy, jealousy, and greed, although these emotions are related. Envy, she writes, is an angry feeling that someone else is enjoying something desirable that they have and we do not. We want to act out our envy by taking it away for ourselves or to spoil it. Jealousy is based in envy but involves another person. This is the feeling that someone we love has been taken or is in danger of being taken. Both of these emotions are connected with greed, an “insatiable craving” that is beyond what one needs and what others are willing to give. Greed is introjection, something to be sucked from outside to inside, while envy is projection, something that is cast outside from inside (*Envy* 181).

When Klein describes infantile envy in a baby only months old, it’s like reading about a horror movie monster. Baby feels helpless and abandoned because mother is keeping all the good stuff for her evil self, and so becomes enraged. Anyone who has raised children and hurried into the nursery to find a red-faced, screaming infant will recognize that baby is not just sad, not just angry, but enraged. I watch, mystified, as my first two sons twist and arch their backs, turn away wailing, and suck on their fingers instead of the offered breast. Because I keep returning, their rage diminishes and they gaze adoringly into my eyes, softly patting that which is their source of life. Always the day dawns when they bite, a look of triumph on their faces as they show me that they, too, have power.

Klein tells us that baby feels that mother is “omnipotent and that it is up to her to prevent all pain and evil from internal and external sources” (*Envy* 185). She is not living up to baby’s demands, as no one could. That is why baby bites the breast that feeds it, and wants to spoil it. But, according to Klein, it is not just babies biting the breast that is

a sadistic act of harm but they also want to smear the breast with feces and urine—a potent “envious spoiling of the object” (*Envy* 183). It is important for baby to learn that mother can withstand the onslaughts and still returns to meet the baby’s needs. This time of frustration teaches babies that they can cope with their own emotions and they learn to trust (*Envy* 188). More importantly, it is the baby who is frightened by its own anger and aggression, believing that it has destroyed the object of desire in its rage: baby feels guilty. This is the beginning of a conscience based on connectedness and a return to Stout’s definition. Stout clarifies that conscience is not something learned nor is it an action but an affect—an emotion—it is this “emotional attachment that gives rise to moral character” (*Sociopath* 25; *Paranoia* 75).

Klein sounds far-fetched, even for a neo-Freudian therapist. Most people balk at the “smearing feces and urine.” But, when a father of a friend’s business is broken into, the robbers defecate upon the father’s desk. Curious, I ask the detective about this and he off-handedly tells me that they often find excrement at crime sites. Then, when my eldest son is four, his father sends a fire truck to ride around the yard in and I observe his five-year-old cousin intently twisting and trying to break off the antennae. Envy is a pernicious “sour grapes.”

Klein doesn’t go deep enough for me—where does the envy come from? I believe that at its base, this primitive, innate envy is about my old friend, fear. Baby fears that mother, the source of life, is not coming back, that she is keeping everything for herself and it will die. But, it is more than that because if baby is not talked to, held and cuddled, and merely has its needs met, it may die of *marasmus*, from the Greek *marasmos* “to waste away.” It is the “nonorganic failure to thrive”—a literal pining away.

It is through the connections of love that an infant begins to feel gratitude, the fear lessens and baby begins to trust and believe in the goodness of the other, and by extension, his or her own goodness.

Klein tells us that all of us have innate levels of envy and gratitude (*Envy* 176). Some are low in envy while others are high. On some level, we understand that envy is a dangerous emotion. I often think of this Kleinian theory when I hear about someone being stalked, because envy of another person's ability (what Klein would call "the love object") to make one happy is an issue in victimizing relationships where the former significant other is seen as a withholding persecutor. In this way it is a defense against envy to objectify and devalue the beloved object. People are stalked and sometimes murdered because if the murderer can't have them, then no one else will—in envy, it seems, the lost object must be recovered or destroyed.

Often we know what will make our relationships work better. When I am trying to save my second marriage, I read a book about relationships written by a marriage therapist, and one case history goes right to my heart. The husband reports how he knows that if he goes home after work on a Friday and greets his wife with a kiss, they will have a nice weekend together. He goes home and doesn't kiss his wife and they have a "crappy" weekend. He ends his story with two important comments. First, he didn't want to give her the satisfaction, and the other is that he was mystified why he chose the "crappy" weekend over the warm, loving weekend they could have had as a couple.

This somewhat insignificant vignette about someone else's life is very significant to me. Just about everyone I tell it to understands what happened here, and I harass my friends until they explain it to me. When I ask why they don't see that *both* people contribute to the shared happiness they tell me it is about power: who has it and who does not. Then, I let it drop. I think that kind of power is useless if it only makes you miserable. Envy of your partner's power in a relationship is envying yourself: you gave them that power the second you decided to risk caring about him or her. Competition for power in a mutual relationship means there has to be a loser and backing anyone into a corner is a lose/lose situation. The distancing partner "wins" but at a great cost while the "losing" partner is needlessly hurt. The mitigating factors of envy are love and gratitude as Klein tells us, and she also points out that envy spoils the capacity for enjoyment and gratitude (*Envy* 187).

I understand this as one of the dynamics between my parents. My father had the chronic need to exert dominance and control through violence, because of his envy of my mother's influence on his feelings about himself as a man and a person. She got even with him by flirting and hinting at a sexual relationship with nearly every man who entered into her sphere, keeping him off balance. This is why he always struck at the feminine parts of her, always pointed an accusing finger at her, and disavowed his paternity. That was her special power that she could show him his weakness as a man, and then he would show her who was in control. They pushed each others' buttons in ways in which only an intimate can. If only my mother could have seen herself as more than a sexual object, as a whole human being with autonomy. If only, I think, my father could have controlled his fears of emotional dependency and allowed them to be

mitigated by love for my mother and his family—if only he could have felt gratitude for having us in his life. Maybe then, he could have felt worthy through us and not thrown us away.

Envy and its accompanying malice and spite, is the foundation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It is pride born of envy against mankind that causes Satan to wage war with God and Heaven: Who first seduc'd them to that foul revolt?/Th' infernal Serpent; he it was, whose guile/ Stirr'd up with Envy and Revenge, deceiv'd/ The Mother of Mankind . . .(Book I, 33-36). If the mitigating factors of envy are love and gratitude, then it is love and gratitude that brings grace. In Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, Satan broods on how far he has fallen and considers repenting and requesting an act of grace; he nearly decides to love God and be grateful for who he is and what he has. It takes courage to overcome that particular ego-death and he just can't bridge the gap, either.

In middle age, my father began telling me various stories about his life in no a particular order. I fancy that he was starting to think about the end coming soon and was cramming for the final. The first story he tells me is how he came to be diagnosed as a sociopath in the late 1940s as an inmate at the Green Bay Reformatory where he was sentenced after pulling armed stick-ups, violent felonies.

He is standing in line with his tray to get his dinner when the guy in front of him has some kind of fit. He falls to the ground, writhing, and my father just steps over him and demands his dinner. As he tells me this, he illustrates the scene by holding out an invisible tray with both hands and a grimace on his face, eyes wide, demanding his pretend dinner.

A state psychiatrist was watching him. He looked at dad's file, diagnosed him as a sociopath, and transferred him to the Hospital for the Criminally Insane in Waupun. As an inmate there, it is Dad's job to take the inmates down to have electroshock therapy. Each morning, he tells me, he was really happy to get his breakfast because if you didn't get breakfast, they were going to shock *you*. This gives credence to Breggin's claim that ECT is used as a form of social control.

I think about this diagnosis eight years after his death when I study the "Good Samaritan Experiment" by Darley and Batson. In this experiment, divinity students are sent to give a talk about the Good Samaritan and they are given varying amounts of time to get to the place where they are to speak. On the way, they will confront a person in dire need of help. The experiment will explore who helps and who doesn't, and why or why not. It may be assumed that each of them will help because, after all, they are divinity students and their talk is on the Good Samaritan which should make helping foremost in their mind. But, that is not what happens. *Time* is the deciding factor on whether they help or not. One man even steps over the confederate to get to his talk on time. No one grabs him and labels him a sociopath—but he wasn't in prison, either.

The late 1940s was a kind of dark ages for psychiatry. I think of that old movie *The Snake Pit* and, from my father's tales and what I later learned in college, that wasn't too far off point. Electroshock therapy was crude, and if that didn't work, there was always the frontal lobotomy.

Some of my father's darkest stories were from Waupun. There was a "pickle king" from Milwaukee who had killed his wife and put her in one of the pickle barrels in

his factory. For years, he told people she'd run off with another man. While on vacation many years later, an overzealous employee shipped all the barrels of pickles, and when they opened that last one, there was his wife, shriveled and expertly pickled. Another inmate had been cuckolded and henpecked for decades by his wife. One day she went outside to complain as he cut and stacked their winter's firewood. When the police came for him, they found her and her limbs stacked in the firewood.

Often, he would laugh and joke about his experiences at Waupun but not about the Green Bay Reformatory. He didn't like to talk about that. The only story he gave us from his years in Green Bay was about how well he knew the Bible because when he did his time in "the hole," he soaked the pages in water and ate them. After his death, one of the members of his gang and life-long friend, Glen Drysen, told me that one of his most vivid memories of my father was of him tearing his cell apart in a rage and of the "screws" going in and beating him with their clubs. Glen had watched as the guards dragged him to the elevator, beating him the entire time.

My father told me how it all began for him. My grandfather never believed that my father was his son. My grandfather would sit across from him with his belt folded in his hands, pushing it apart and then snapping it together. While doing this he would tell him how he was going to beat him. Sometimes this happened for days. I believe my father because I know my grandfather and he was like a bulldozer without a driver. My grandfather was a criminal, too. Until the day he died he was proud of his moonshining and was one of the finest bootleggers in Racine. He proudly showed me the newspaper clippings from when the G-men broke up his still and broke his bottles of beer. As he

chuckled and winked at me he said: “But, they *never* got the barrel of beer I had buried under the porch. Never!”

My father was eleven when he first stood in court to hear the judge sentencing him to the boys’ school. My grandmother, angry, started beating him around the head. So many years later and his resentment and hurt were still fresh, “Christ! I just got sentenced to boys’ school! No one ever came to see me when I was there, either. No letters, nothing.”

He was sent to a boy’s school around Mondovi. They used to send the boys out to work for the farmers in the area. My dad worked with horses and other animals. Sometimes, he’d saddle up and go riding and visiting. He would be sitting talking with people and suddenly the little heads of his pet chipmunks would start to pop up out of his pockets. He smiled as he told me this, because people really got a kick out of that.

When he first got there, he was just a little kid. My father wasn’t a big man, only five foot, nine inches, so he wasn’t a big kid, either. Still, his chore at the school for boys was to hitch a team of horses to the garbage wagon and empty it down the side of a hill with a pitchfork.

There was a kid, a bully, who used to pick on everyone because he was the biggest kid there. He “got” my dad a couple of times, but he never explained what that “got” was.

One evening, he hooked up the horses and took out the garbage wagon and started to fork the garbage over the hill. That big kid came out there after him. Dad knew what was coming and pretended not to see or hear him. As he walked up to the side of the

wagon, Dad turned and threw the pitchfork, landing it in his chest. He made sure he was dead and then threw him over the hill, covering him with garbage. Everyone just assumed that he'd run away because kids were always running away. They'd bring them back and extend their time but sometimes they made it and never returned. That was the first person he killed. He asked me, "What was I supposed to do? He was a bully and he deserved it. If he hadn't been a bully, he'd still be alive."

The boys' school was brutal. My father explained to me how they beat the boys with a leather belt that had holes punched in it. A few years later, the Milwaukee Sentinel did an exposé on the school and there was picture of this strap in the article. The force of hitting with the strap caused the skin to go into the holes--more damage that way. After boy's school, my father joined the Navy but when his true age of sixteen was discovered, he was discharged. He tried other things but nothing seemed to work out for him, and that was when he and his friends had formed a gang that committed armed robberies. The gang was caught when one member was found stealing a radio out of a car at a dealership and told on the others to save himself. The pocket full of diamond rings had given him away.

It is Philip Zimbardo's writings and research which gives me a context of understanding of what my father probably experienced in prison, both as an inmate in an inhumane system and as an individual. The brutality of his childhood was magnified by the brutality of his incarcerations. I wonder what I would have done in my father's position. So often I thought he was evil personified, but I didn't know how he'd been shaped by the people and social systems in his world.

When my father died, the only thing I requested from my stepmother and did not receive was my father's baby picture. He is cherubic, smiling with one tooth showing, his ice-blue Irish eyes shining in the black and white photo from the 1930s. In this little boy-baby was promise and hope.

In his forties, my father worked with men in jail with Father John Murtaugh. Dad was a big proponent of prison reform, and felt that our country needed to make up its mind: was it going to punish or rehabilitate because it wasn't doing either very well. He advocated reform utilizing the same kind of system that has been used by some mental hospitals in that the inmates move through different buildings, each having a higher level of personal responsibility. The last building, he thought, should be arranged like the outside world where the inmates would have to get up and go to a job every morning just as they would when they left prison for the outside world. The only thing about his incarceration that he felt good about was that he learned a trade, one he could take with him no matter where he went. Being able to do something useful gives us an identity, fosters agency, and builds self-esteem and self-respect.

One of the teachings from Monroe's study is that when people feel threatened bad things can and do happen. I realized as an adult that my mother didn't act to protect me when she should have because she felt that her survival was at stake. In Michael Moore's documentary *Sicko*, I was struck by the former health insurance worker who is haunted by the people she routinely turned down. Each time we choose to protect ourselves over someone else, instead of being creative and looking for helpful alternatives, we lose something of ourselves. If anything, what this woman illustrates is a healthy haunting in the choices she made. Imagine what the people who weren't filmed would say to justify

their actions: I was just following orders and doing my job. Sound familiar? In order to pass a test such as this, you have to take it, and if you fail, you have to do better the next time. If we don't do better next time, who will be there to help us when we need it? This is the crux of community, of a world waiting to be born to us when the bottom line doesn't decide everything, when each of us has the integrity to uphold and preserve what is right, and when important things such as public health, welfare, and well-being are sacrosanct instead of profits.

If my father was a sociopath, he was homemade. I do not use my father's stories to excuse his behavior—there is no excuse for evil behavior towards other human beings. But, understanding what made my father this way gives me a personal distance. It is about him; it wasn't something innate in this little girl so terrorized and hurt by her father. She could have been any little girl.

I don't know if there is supernatural evil in the world. In considering all the terrible things that we are capable of doing to each other in the name of religion and political ideology, of the things we are capable of doing to the people we love and who love us, and the way about two-thirds of us tend to sell each other out, I shudder to imagine that there could be any more awful things that we haven't yet stumbled upon and perpetrated.

Certainly there is human evil in the world, but the question is one of cause and effect. Did my father's upbringing and subsequent life make him the way he was, or was he born a sociopath? I tend to think that some of the sociopathic typologies of Theodore Millon are due to childhood trauma and cultural indoctrination. Certainly, the

unprincipled and the disingenuous psychopaths would be successful in our corporate culture. The covetous sociopath is all about envy and getting his or her due from the rest of us. My father was an explosive psychopath; Millon describes very clearly how these individuals are walking cauldrons of hypersensitive, explosive resentments. The abrasive psychopath is all about power and being able to get people to run out of the way. If there are any “pure” sociopaths, they would be the malevolent and the tyrannical psychopaths—these are the people we normally think of when we hear the term “sociopath.”

The overall impression one gets in researching psychopaths is that they are emotional children stuck in adult bodies. I want what I want, they scream, and begin to smash and grab, steal, terrorize, and engage in all of the terrible acts that they are capable of committing. I watched as my three boys developed self-control but it was sometimes at the expense of helpless animals and innocent people. For whatever reason, self-control came late to my father as he followed the pattern of sociopaths, mellowing out in mid-life.

I find that those of us who feel they are members of the human tribe working for the good of the whole, keep me going. We study serial killers, the causes of genocide, social psychology, and sociology, but we haven’t studied much of what makes a person or people become inner directed for the common good. Monroe’s study is a good beginning.

In a curious way, the Sun Trail, the path we walk in life, based on honor, respect, and balance became the cornerstone of my life but without a community. I found that

spirituality and connections to Creator are about the decisions we make as individuals on the kind of people we want to be. Honor is dealing honestly and openly with people and not getting caught up in a zero-sum mentality. Respect is reverence for everyone at all stages of life and levels of awareness for our planet as our home. Balance brings blessings born of not being too much one way or another—this is the promise in honoring my seventh direction, *where I stand*.

From my foray into Buddhism, I learned that control is an illusion because we control very little in our lives. There is no better illustration of that than at the present time as we suffer through an economic collapse in our country that spreads throughout the world, and as two men surface who have stolen billions from thousands of people who trusted them. There is no doubt in my mind that the people victimized believe these two men to be evil and I tend to agree. Certainly, every definition I know fits them and their callous disregard for other people. I admire the victims featured on the news because they are busy rebuilding their lives after taking such a huge financial hit. They are not sitting around wringing their hands, and my heart aches for them because they trusted and believed in bad men who perpetrated evil acts. They refuse to be victims and illustrate another Buddhist tenet: If you don't like your life, change your focus.

I tried to get my father to talk about my childhood, the things that had gone on, but he wouldn't. He would get angry and so I learned oblique ways of probing him. Finally, one day he didn't become angry, he just looked at me with bewilderment and said, "Sometimes, when I think back on those days, it is as though I was a whole different person." I felt only sadness for what could have been. And, I felt relief that it was over

and an overwhelming gratitude that I was still here to meet the new day a whole, hale, happy woman.

In the end, I discover that there are no real answers, no puzzle to be solved. There is only a life to be lived and all that really matters is that I continue to wake up each morning and choose what I will leave behind me in the evening. I feel gratitude for the lessons I have learned from my painful childhood, and I embrace my shadow side, drawing strength from it while staying vigilant. I trust in the universe, and other people. To live in fear is not living. I understand that control is an illusion and how little I am able to control: just me. Nothing else—and not even that completely.

I watch the Canada geese flying overhead. It doesn't matter if they are headed north or south, it is always the same. They take turns flying at the point, the place where the wind resistance is the greatest and the most tiring. For the entire time that it takes for them to pass over, they call back and forth, honks of encouragement and care. Their journey is an ancient, holy one. I read an article about a farmer in South America who noticed a single goose flying and calling down to the ground. As he looked across his fields, a movement caught his eye. He saw another goose marching resolutely northward. When he caught her, her mate landed and cast a watchful eye. Her wing was broken even though the bond between them was not. It was not so much this bond that captured my imagination as it was how she decided that she would *walk* her migration north, broken wing be damned. She must have evaded many predators in her journey and she must have felt fear but kept going.

The more I learn about our mysterious planet and species, the more I believe that we have only scratched the surface. We continue to find new species of life each year. I wonder about things such as how the Monarch butterfly flies from Canada to Mexico each autumn, how hummingbirds the size of my thumb migrate to central and South America for the winter. I marvel at the tiny caterpillars in our raspberries that stick out straight and pretend to be tiny sticks when we disturb them, another which glues flotsam all over itself so that it looks like a miniature traveling compost heap, and still another that chooses to disguise itself as a bird dropping. Comical by any definition, they really aren't much different from us—they're just trying to keep from being eaten alive by the forces around them.

I belong to the human tribe. Many members of this tribe reached out and taught me a new ways of thinking, being, and acting. Without the grace of these human connections, I would have remained stuck in the survival of the fittest, and that is no world for a human being.

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