

Into the Dark Cauldron

A Memoir

by

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The Beginning of the End

In 1986 on Wednesday night, August 27, I drove to a hospital in Century City, California. I was thirty-seven years old. I knew I was in bad shape and knew I needed help. The company I worked for, National Medical Enterprises, owned the hospital and I wanted to go into a rehab program for alcohol and drug addiction and I assumed someone there could direct me to one. I would find out they in fact had an inpatient program and would also find out later from a staff member that the actor Dennis Hopper and also Carrie Fisher and David Carradine had been where I would be and had attempted to do that which I would attempt to do, which was get sober. Of course I wasn't supposed to be told that information because we were all anonymous.

Beside me in the passenger seat was my buddy, my constant companion for many years and my best friend, through thick and thin, Alcohol. In the back seat rode Marijuana (weed; pot; grass) and Cocaine (girl; blow; snow; crack; rocks). LSD (Lysergic Acid Diethylamide; acid; lucy) and Mescaline were in the trunk and Hashish (hash) clung to the rear bumper. Frantically calling and chasing after the car were Heroin (boy; skag), Methamphetamine, (Dexedrine; Desoxyn; speed; crank; uppers) Phencyclidine (PCP; angel dust; water) and various sedatives and hypnotics (downers) such as Secobarbital (Seconal; reds), Diazepam (Valium) and Tuinal (benders). Quaalude was somewhere in the pursuing group but except for Desbutal (5 mg Methamphetamine and 30 mg Pentobarbital, upper and downer combined) I never really liked any of the others. I lost them all in the traffic.

All that, and those that traveled with me protested vehemently against my plan and Alcohol had on several occasions attempted to wrest control of the steering wheel from me and direct the car into a liquor store parking lot but I was determined and I had driven on to my destination. When I pulled into the parking garage beneath the hospital I got out and before I slammed the car door shut I yelled at my passengers to be gone and I could hear them laugh uproariously, mockingly, derisively, as I started

toward the elevator and as the metal doors closed, Alcohol and Cocaine yelled out, screamed at me, first one insulting rejoinder and then the other, "You'll be back and we'll be waiting!"

It was by no means a direct route to California and the hospital where I eventually committed myself. It was actually quite a twisting and long winding journey. It really began, of course, when I was born in Detroit, Michigan on early Sunday morning at 4:52 AM on January 2nd, 1949 to a Colored woman (mother) and a Colored man (father) which made me a Colored male child that weighed six pounds and six ounces with brown eyes, the second child of an eventual three.

The most important influence that sent me west across the country was a woman I met in college, Wayne State University, when I was just turning twenty-one years of age. My path to college was fairly straight. Having taken summer classes I graduated Chadsey High School early, when I was seventeen, in June of 1966. I was elected vice president of the senior class and was in the top ten percent in grade point average. I started Wayne State in the fall of that year but first, over that summer I had served as what could be called an apprentice to several older young men who I came to understand were role models. I admired those men and for reasons unbeknownst to me, aspired to be what many young men I knew wanted to be as they grew up in Detroit in the 1960s which was some form of a pimp or a hustler or a mack or a drug dealer and do as they appeared to do and associate with fine, exciting women and drive big powerful cars. The Cadillac Eldorado was the one I desired.

I wanted to wear gabardine pants and shirts and wool and mohair suits and the best and most popular shoes on my feet, that were made of lizards and 'gators, and snake skins that shined and I wanted to sport diamonds and gold that glittered. I wanted to buy my clothes from not just Sermans and Hot Sams and Hudson's but Cousins and Scholnick's and have my hair processed with waves to the side or permed or pressed with a hot comb or a natural Afro if I chose.

I didn't want to go to strip clubs and nudie joints and titty bars. That was for chumps and gumps and punks and tricks (johns). I wanted to pick up my woman from the stroll or from those establishments when she got

off work and take her home with me so we could count (her, my) money together. All that is what I wanted to do, all those things and at seventeen years of age I wanted to be cool and above all, respected.

By my 18th birthday in January of 1967 I was already five years into drinking alcohol. I had started smoking weed fairly regularly at fifteen and at that same age my brother, two years older than me, bought me my first pills (uppers). We called them decks and they were ten for a dollar. My good friend at that time, who lived across the street from me, and who, in five years, I would come close to shooting, sold them to me. He said to take four or five. My brother said six. I should have taken three but I took them all. I stayed up two days. Just like alcohol, the pills gave me confidence and courage.

Not only was I attracted to what was referred to as 'the game,' it attracted me and I immersed myself into the people and activities of that unique world. I went to after-hours establishments (joints) such as Stokes, Mr. Kelly's, The Green Door, Kaline's and the Democratic Club. I spent as much time as possible on the main stroll, 12th Street, where the 'working' girls (prostitutes) plied their trade. I was selling weed and busting (filling) illegal 'scripts (prescriptions) and selling the pills that I was dropping (taking).

I was going in three directions, I was hanging out in the streets, I was going to college and I was working part time at Henry Ford Hospital filing and pulling X-rays from the vault and delivering them to the X-ray department. I worked around young people my age and a little older, mostly women and we had parties seemingly every weekend. We drank alcohol together and I provided weed and to those who wanted them, pills, to my co-workers.

On early Sunday morning, July 23, 1967 one of the largest and most destructive civil uprising (riot) began on 12th Street. I had been in that joint that was raided by the police, the incident that started it all. I knew that place and I knew some of the people who had been arrested and who had been there on the street. My role was to be the looter. I stole inexpensive watches, and shoes that didn't fit and clothes that wouldn't last. My friend from across the street and I filled up another friend's car

with bottles of alcohol. I drank scotch and gin and threw bottles from the back seat and then passed out while the city burned and people died and 12th Street and the city would never be the same. Detroit was altered forever, not by just the destruction but also the ensuing "White Flight," the rise in heroin use and the return of the young soldiers from the war in Vietnam who were angry and jobless.

In the fall of 1967 I quit the hospital job and started working full time at the Sealtest Dairy plant. I worked the afternoon and night shifts and rotated so that sometimes I worked the weekends. When I worked afternoons I could get off at eleven or twelve, go home and change clothes and go to the clubs, the joints and hang out in the streets. Sealtest was my third job. My first job was at a nursery. A young man I owed money to from gambling, playing cards, got me that one so I could pay him. I was a junior in high school and made seventy-five cents an hour. The hospital was my senior year and I made less than two dollars an hour. I was driving a 1966 Arcadian blue Ford LTD with a darker-blue landau top. It wasn't a Cadillac but it had to do. It was the family car but I drove it most of the time. My dad had bought it for my graduation. He was working long hours at Ford Motor Company and sometimes a second job and my mom, who didn't have to work, was dealing with my sister who was eight years younger than me. My brother had moved out soon after returning from Vietnam and they knew it was only a matter of time before I got a place of my own. As far as they could see I was working, going to school and hanging out with my friends. As long as I stayed out of jail and the police weren't involved, they let me come and go as I pleased and our middle-class life continued.

The pay was good at Sealtest, close to working at an automobile factory. Several nights a week I loaded trucks with products from the refrigerated area. I hooked up with several nefarious drivers and gave them extra on their orders and they slipped me cash. I stole butter and sold it and stole milk and gave it to the young ladies I knew from high school who were having babies.

In the spring of 1968 we got a customer who had four large trucks. His drivers only ordered half gallons of milk, no butter or half and half or

orange juice, only milk. An old-time driver told me they were mafia connected. It wasn't long before one of the drivers approached me about paying me for extra product. I held them off for a month and then met their boss at a Coney Island restaurant and negotiated a price. I gave them extra milk when I could and met one of the drivers later to be paid. With the added money I bought more weed and pills and business increased.

In June of that year I was standing outside of the Local 876 on West Grand Boulevard as the people from a cabaret turned out at 2 a.m. on a Saturday night, Sunday morning. A young lady (Colored; Negro; Black; African American) walked by and spoke, flirted with me. I smiled at her but didn't respond. She came back by a while later and flirted again and we began to talk. I saw she wore a dark mini-skirt with a white blouse and dark colored high heels. She also wore a short blonde wig and red lipstick.

She saw me in a rust-colored suit with white straw shoes and a long collared white shirt with a white and rust tie. Maybe she noticed my jewelry, I didn't know. I did know she had, what we called, chosen me. She wanted to get to know me, perhaps be with me. Something passed between us as we stood and talked that night. I would very soon find out what that was but I sensed and she sensed we were both on front street, presenting and representing 'the game.'

I got her phone number and the very next afternoon we went for a ride to Belle Isle. I was driving the other family car, a 1959 black Ford Fairlane. We talked as I rode around and then we talked as I parked and we walked and talked and I heard a lot as she had a lot to say. She wore casual shorts and a summer blouse and tennis shoes. There was no blonde wig and her hair was fairly short and natural and her brown skin was clear and smooth and she wore no makeup. This young woman was seventeen years old, two years younger than me and still in high school. She lived two blocks off of 12th Street and I found out, even before we met, she believed she was meant to walk that street. Just like me she wanted to be in that life. Her name was Cynthia. She wrote her name as Cyn and that's what everyone called her. Cyn would come to believe she cared for me, that she couldn't do without me and I would come to believe she believed that.

She had to take two classes in school that summer. She had fallen behind and wouldn't graduate without those classes. I soon found out she wanted to drop out of school altogether. She didn't care if she graduated or not. I told her I wouldn't (couldn't) have anything to do with her, I couldn't be with her if she didn't graduate. I picked her up from school when I could and we were together as often as possible over the summer. I made sure to get her home by curfew and then I did what I wanted without her. I also had other young ladies I was dealing with. She and I went to parties together and she hung out with my friends and me but there wasn't a whole lot we could do since she was still living with her parents, who thought I was a nice young man. She was unhappy at home and she clashed constantly with her mother but we made it through the winter and she graduated from high school in June of 1969. She was eighteen years old.

That same month Bone, the guy I grew up with, who lived across the street from me, beat up a friend of mine I had met and worked with at the hospital. I had introduced her to him, helped them get together and I felt responsible and didn't appreciate what he had done. She had run across the street to my house crying. Cyn and I were together and I had the two of them wait there as I went across the street to talk with him and see what had happened. We went upstairs and we argued and he pushed me and I broke a window with my arm. I pushed him away and he backed down the stairs. When he came up at me, to jump on me, I pulled the sub nosed .38 I carried. I didn't point it at him but I let him see it, made sure he knew I had it. His older brother was there along with his mom and two other young men I knew. I told everyone to back off, I was leaving. He stopped and then went back down the stairs and I eased down the stairs and out of the house and walked back across the street. It was a bad situation, living across the street from one another so I stayed with a friend for three days and then moved into a one bedroom apartment on the east side, on Holcomb near Jefferson. A week later Cyn moved in with me.

Now the two of us were together. We were going to do the things we wanted to do and live the lives we wanted to live. I had stolen all the milk I could from Sealtest and had to slow down before I got caught. The weed

and pill business was doing pretty good so I made a decision. Sealtest had a program where I could take a leave of absence and keep my job and seniority if I was going to school so I told them I was taking summer classes and was granted six months off.

Cyn and I drank alcohol together, me more than her. We smoked weed and dropped pills, me more than her and we snorted cocaine. Cyn liked cocaine. Cyn sold pills to the girls on the street and she walked 12th Street on occasions but I didn't want her 'working' there, it was too dangerous. She 'worked' out of two bars, one on the west side and one near downtown, where I knew the owners. For a while she 'worked' out of a house (brothel) near the east side.

Cyn wasn't into it, the dark life, the way she thought she would be. If she made some money she was ready to come home or meet me at the after-hours joint to party with me and her new friends. She tried dancing at a strip club for a while but she didn't like it. She would go to the joint when I told her not to. When we first got together I could check her by just giving her a look. I began having to raise my voice and make veiled threats. Our relationship was breaking up, going down and I was losing control. She didn't know what she wanted to do and what she did she only did half way. At the same time Detroit was going down and not half way. By the end of 1969 people who Cyn and I knew in 'the game,' big timers, were dying.

Texas Slim, who lived down the street from Cyn, turned up dead, shot to death after being tortured. Marzette, who I had snorted dope with upstairs at Mr. Kelly's, one of the biggest dope dealers (cocaine) in the city died of kidney failure and a war broke out over his territory. The last remaining popular stroll, 12th Street, was mostly burnt-out buildings and empty, trashed lots overgrown with weeds and grass.

The downward spiral began in 1966, the year I graduated from high school, I saw it but didn't see it. Johnny Red and Johnny Black, two of the bigger pimps in the city had shot it out and killed each other. Then next, there was the riot in '67. Finally heroin took over as the main drug. People I knew with potential, athletes and scholars, along with players and 'working' girls were getting strung out.

The tricks (johns), the few Whites who still came to the stroll and the Blacks too were risking their lives. By the time they could get upstairs to the room with their girl their cars were often broken into and they were being robbed, better before than after their date. My two partners and I had to stand on the street in the doorways and stay on alert and be on guard to protect what was ours, which included ourselves. I didn't want to have to shoot anyone.

Arthur Baby, Adolph, Stokes, Delicious, West Side, all those once at the top of 'the game' were barely holding on or on the down slope. In a little over three years all that I had been attracted to and that attracted me was falling apart, changing and becoming something that I could no longer recognize. There were new rules and no rules, at the same time. In the streets I was known as Schoolboy and by the winter of 1969 Schoolboy no longer wanted to play in 'the game.'

My brother had worked at Chrysler for a while before he went away to the war and still had connections there. He got Cyn a job and I went back to work. They didn't want me back. I had been fired twice for being late and missing work but Sealtest was unionized and the head of my chapter had to make sure they let me back or weaken the union. Cyn worked three weeks, quit her job, packed her clothes while I was at work and left. I found out she moved in with a girlfriend and then later moved back home. It wasn't long before we completely lost contact.

Wayne State University was an urban school. Its main campus had streets that ran through it and was expanding outwards in what at that time was an area of the city that had one of the highest crime rates. School had been a challenge for me from my very first quarter in September of 1966. I initially went mainly because of pressure from my parents than my own desire. I would be the first in my immediate family to attend college and hopefully graduate.

I was of course supposed to know why I was going when people asked so I thought about it and would usually say I wanted to be a lawyer. I was taking courses of political science, economics, speech and French as requirements. It was difficult for me, both the classes and the academic environment. For the first time in my life I struggled in school. Me, a

nearly all A student in middle school and president of our graduating class, honor role student in high school, second to the president, was failing.

In several classes there were only a few other people of my color. I had taken French in high school and in my college French class it was as if the professor went through everything I knew in the first two months. To make matters worse the professor was a Colored (Negro; Black; African American) woman and each time she returned my test papers I could tell she was disappointed in me. I dropped the class.

The 1960s was not just a period of time of social, racial and political unrest but turbulent upheaval. It was an exciting time unlike anything I had been, and would ever go through. From the time I started college there had been various civil rights groups that had come on campus to speak and organize. There was the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and I became aware of James Farmer Jr., Bernice Fisher and their new leader in 1966, Floyd McKissick.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) sent someone to hold meetings and Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown rose to prominence. In 1969 they dropped the Nonviolent to become Student National Coordinating Committee and I, born colored and identified by some as Negro, turned Black and Black Power moved to the forefront.

The Black Panthers had a chapter near campus and the White Panther Party, co-founded by John Sinclair in Ann Arbor and Detroit, had a chapter on campus. I passed by their little nondescript storefront building as I went to, and came from classes. I already knew about the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Southern Christian Leadership conference (SCLC) whose members were well-known and included Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph David Abernathy. The NAACP and SCLC were the organizations for my parents and my Colored (Negro; Black; African American) friends' parents. The rising groups were for those closer to my age.

There was also the Nation of Islam that began in Detroit and whose members were sometimes on campus passing out literature. I had seen, in my early and mid-teens, how thugs and gangsters in my neighborhood

had begun wearing suits and bowties and selling the NOI paper and bean pies. There was a real thug called Tomb who was going with one of the young ladies who lived next door to me. He was at least ten or twelve years older than me and we would holler out to each other because we had the same first name. He went away to prison for several years and when he got out he was a Black Muslim and dressed nicely and spoke differently and one day I sat with him on my porch and he talked to me about Cassius Clay changing his name to Muhammad Ali and told me why Malcolm X would be offed (killed) and within months Malcolm was dead.

I watched these organizations that came to campus from afar. I went to their lectures and read their pamphlets but I didn't join any of them. I did however get involved when Black students marched and protested and sat in and voiced demands for a relevant theater department in spring of 1970. I had taken a creative writing class and had written the first of a series of stories (poems) and begun to write a play so I was drawn to their cause.

Those artists who aspired to be actors, actresses, and directors and in other ways, behind the scenes, involved in theater had grown frustrated and tired of the opportunities that were being offered in the established Theatre Department. Of course there was Othello, and Hamlet had been played by a Black actor but *Cyrano de Bergerac*, by Edmond Rostand, *After the Fall* by Arthur Miller, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, by Tennessee Williams, *The Seagull*, by Anton Chekhov and other plays by Ibsen and Moliere, some playwrights and also, as far as the Black students were concerned, most plays, that had been dead for over a hundred years and were not valid for their existence and what they hoped to achieve, were still the main productions being put on. Even the more modern plays were written exclusively by White writers with predominantly White casts.

I was there when one of the first Black Theatre Departments in the United States was established where a serious student could get a degree in Black Theatre. I took acting classes, acted in skits, performed pieces and soliloquies from Shakespeare. I built and tore down sets for plays and read books by, and studied and practiced the techniques of Konstantin Stanislavski, a system often referred to as Method Acting.

We did scenes from *The Dutchman* by Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones;

Imamu Amear Baraka). I was exposed to other Black playwrights and their works as well. Two of significance was *Ceremonies in Dark Old Men* by Lonne Elder III that premiered Off-Off Broadway in New York in 1969 at St. Mark's Playhouse in a production by the Negro Ensemble Company and was runner up for the 1969 Pulitzer in drama. The other was *No Place to be Somebody* by Charles Gordone, a play that received the 1970 Pulitzer Prize for drama. He was the first Black (Colored; Negro; African American) playwright to receive a Pulitzer for drama and his play was the first Off-Broadway play to garner that prestigious award.

Notable actors who came out of Wayne State Theatre Department (White; Black) at this period of time, before, and soon thereafter included Ernie Hudson, Jeffrey Tambor, David L. Regal, Clifford Roquemore, John Carter, Della Reese, Lily Tomlin, S. Epatha Merkerson, among others. In late summer I auditioned and was fortunate (lucky) enough to be given the role of Pete Spivy in the very first Black play to be performed at the main theater, the Bonstelle, on Woodward Avenue. The play was *Blues for Mister Charlie* by James Baldwin and was directed by Earl D. A. Smith who would become not only the first head of the Black Theatre Department but also my mentor and friend.

Those were unique events for me and also the special time I met Darlene, (Black; African American) the woman who altered the course of my life. Darlene had a role in the *Blues for Mister Charlie* play and we were around each other during rehearsals and we partied together during the two-week run of the play. She very rarely got high off of anything. I would find out she was originally from Detroit and had recently returned home to complete her B.A. degree. We grew even closer when the play ended and it wasn't long before she believed she liked (loved?) me and I believed she believed she liked me.

Darlene was eleven years older than me, worked for United Airlines and had traveled extensively, both in the United States and to different parts of the world. She encouraged me to be creative and supported my endeavors. Within a year I had written two plays, one of which was performed at an off-campus theater, directed by a graduate student as a main requirement to earning a Master of Arts Degree in Black Theatre. I

continued writing short stories in poetic form and wrote essays and assisted students in their creative writing classes and was excelling in my speech classes. I dropped all the other courses I didn't want to take.

In the late fall of the year Darlene and I met, Earl cast me as Steve, the lead role in the one-act play, *In New England Winter*, by Ed Bullins. The play was performed on campus, downstairs at the Hillberry Theatre, in the round, where the audience was close and surrounded the actors. I refused to get high before performing and I recognized I had struggled with the desire, almost a need to drink alcohol or use some type of drug in order to go on stage. When the play ended I talked with Earl about my perceived inhibitions and I realized I would much rather be alone with words than performing in front of people.

I became friends with Gerald, (Black; African American) a young man around my age who everyone called Gerry. He was a classmate and fellow acting student and he sold me my first hit of mescaline but I didn't like the way it made me feel, it didn't do enough so I started looking elsewhere. My brother introduced me to a young man (White) in his building who sold both mescaline and LSD, including windowpane and blotter acid. So by the winter of 1970 I was taking psychedelic, hallucinogenic substances, drinking alcohol heavily, dropping pills and on occasions snorting cocaine. I bought large quantities of mescaline and LSD from my brother's friend to sell, along with bags of weed. Business was good so I put in for, and was granted an extended leave from Sealtest.

On December 28, 1970, Darlene took me, for my upcoming 22nd birthday to where she had once lived, California. It was my first flight on an airplane. We went to San Francisco where we stayed four days and three nights. I walked along Fisherman's Warf and rode across the Golden Gate Bridge to Sausalito. I traveled down twisting Lombard Street and watched what appeared to be a different colored sun as it set there in the west where I had never been before. I drank alcohol and smoked good weed with friends of Darlene's.

We flew down to Los Angeles on the last day of that year and brought 1971 in at a party one of Darlene's friends gave. He was one of the most popular DJ's in Southern California and I was impressed by him and the

people who were there. It was a different kind of 'game.' I snorted good cocaine, smoked good weed, drank champagne and in a haze I heard an early release of Marvin Gaye's record *What's Going On*.

We spent four days and three nights in Los Angeles and we partied for my birthday. I saw the Hollywood sign up close and stood at Sunset and Vine and saw iconic buildings. I looked down at footprints and handprints of stars and legends at Grauman's Chinese Theater. I saw the Pacific Ocean stretch out before me until it disappeared in the distance. When we returned home the temperature was 24 degrees and it was snowing, sideways. Before that trip California, for me, had been somewhere vague and distant. A far away place I had seen on television and in movies. I had read about it but it wasn't real because it had never existed in my reality. In winter times I would hear the weather being given on the news. In Chicago it's 29 degrees with snow and wind, Cleveland is 27 with sleet, and Detroit is 25 with flurries, San Francisco is partly cloudy with a high of 58 and Los Angeles is 69 and sunny.

San Francisco had been beautiful to me. It had an urban feel I could relate to and yet with the steep streets that rose and fell and almost made me dizzy as I leaned forward or backward and walked them when I was high, it was unlike any place I had ever seen. Even the people seemed different somehow. In contrast, Los Angeles not just felt but appeared huge in area and swallowed me up and I rode around lost. Los Angeles had been warm and sunny and cloudy and rainy. Yet, when I returned to Detroit, for the first time in my life, I could think and feel that I didn't have to exist within what I was going through, that life wasn't like this everywhere and California became, in my thoughts, a way out of the rising violence and the snow and bitter cold I hated so much.

I asked for my job back in March of 1971 and as the weather warmed in April, although I had never myself ridden, I bought a red and white 650 cc Triumph Bonneville motorcycle. A friend took a classmate and me from school, who I had seen on a green and white Harley Davidson 900 cc Sportster, to the dealer. My classmate instructed me on how to start it and how to switch the gears as he rode it back to my neighborhood. I got on and he sat behind me. After I kick started it and put it in gear we took off

down the street, jumped the curb, went almost a block and came to an abrupt halt. My classmate said he was glad I put on the brakes and I explained I never put on the brakes, it had just stalled out when I tried to switch gears. We went to a parking lot so I could practice and two days later I was on my own.

I had seen Darlene in a pair of crocheted pants that I liked so I designed several complete outfits that consisted of pants, top, long vest, hat and a small carrying pouch I attached to my leg with a silver pin and a silver chain that went around my waist. I rode my bike like that. Sometimes I sported jeans with a white leather jacket and a purple headband or a purple suede jacket with fringes and a red suede headband.

While at a party under the influence of LSD I heard the Jimi Hendrix album *Electric Ladyland* and my mind was affected (blown). I left jazz and R&B and got deeply into the rock genre. I bought a guitar and attempted to teach myself how to play. I no longer listened to the Black radio stations and started listening to rock stations, specifically a new station WRIF. I played the Rolling Stones and Santana and the Allman Brothers and Frank Zappa, Edgar and Johnny Winter and all the main rock records and unknown rockers and up and comers like George Clinton and The Parliaments and Funkadelic. If they wailed on the guitar I played them and I played them so loud on my new component set that the neighbors would bang on my door and holler at me to turn it down and then, before long they were banging on my door to be let in so they could dance off of Mick Jagger and the Stones as I blasted *Brown Sugar* and *Can't You Hear Me Knocking*.

I hung out and got high on Plum Street not far from Wayne State which was our version of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury area and home to Detroit's counterculture people. I went to rock concerts at the Eastown Theater on the east side and the Grande Ballroom on Grand River Avenue where I saw MC5 and The Stooges. I lamented the fact that I had missed future greats who had performed there such as Cream, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Janis Joplin, the Grateful Dead, Howlin' Wolf, John Lee Hooker, John Coltrane, Jeff Beck, Procol Harum, Sun Ra and The Who. I was too drunk and under the influence of a mixture of drugs to see the

Rolling Stones at Cobo Hall but I went to Detroit's attempt at Woodstock that was put on at the Michigan State Fairgrounds. I missed the two days there in 1969, and Grand Funk Railroad, Dr. John and Chuck Berry, among others, that was too early, I hadn't been converted at that time. But I made it on May 30 in 1971.

It was an all day festival and I got there early and stayed until the end. Jack, a friend (Black; African American) who I put in a word for and had helped get an apartment down the hall from me and who I had gotten a job at Sealtest, went with me. He had been turned on to the music that blared through his walls and I gave him his first hit of mescaline and he handled it well. We walked around in a daze and tripped and listened to a lineup that included The Allman Brothers Band, The J. Geils Band, The Jam Band, Mutzie, Boz Scaggs, Teagarden and Van Winkle, Tin House, Edgar Winter, Johnny Winter and Bob Seger. Tickets were \$5.00.

I remember vividly that it started raining, hard, and we moved to the grandstand for cover and we watched as everyone in the infield scrambled for cover except for those who had passed out. The first aid people began running onto the grass with stretchers to remove the unconscious so they could be taken to the hospital and they announced over the PA System not to take the little orange pills that were being sold, that they were bad. So just like the original Woodstock it was rainy and muddy and people got sick but we had a great time anyway.

I worked and rode my motorcycle throughout the summer and to those I had grown up with and hung out in the streets and joints with, I wore strange clothes, listened to strange music and took and sold strange drugs. They also believed I had lost my mind and quite possibly turned gay (homosexual). In my new crowd I became known as Doc and several of my new acquaintances in theater who I smoked a lot of hashish with were disappointed to find out from Darlene that she knew I was in fact not gay. However, she said she told those who inquired, as far as she could at that time determine, as to whether I was crazy or not she wasn't sure and therefore didn't know.

In late September the weather was already changing and one night it was unusually chilly. I was on my bike, half loaded, and I followed close

to a bus along Jefferson Avenue to get some warmth from the exhaust. I wouldn't be able to ride my bike much longer. I could feel the coming fall and the idea of the winter that followed made me angry and the fumes from the bus gave me a headache. My thoughts again turned to moving west to warmer weather.

Kat, a young lady who I had met when she 'worked' on 12th Street, who was well known for fighting with the other girls and occasionally a trick, came to visit for a few days. She thought, and said she liked me but I never thought she really liked me. I thought she liked partying with me. She would on occasions disappear from her pimp and we would get together and take LSD and smoke weed and she would drink bottles, of all things, Boone's Farm Apple Wine. Sometimes, while under the influence, I would put the headphones on her and she would listen to Jimi Hendrix, music she had never heard before, and look at his picture on the album covers and cry because he was no longer living (alive).

When it was time for her to leave after this September visit I walked her to the front of the building and waited with her until her cab came. I waved goodbye, walked to the side of the building and my bike was gone. It had been stolen. A year earlier the battery in my car had been taken. The thieves didn't just undo the cables, they cut them and ripped wires out and I had to not only pay to replace the battery but the cables and wiring also. I had put a large chain and lock on the hood to secure it to the grill. I didn't live in, the east side of Detroit but I lived on, the east side. I knew it wouldn't stop anyone who was determined or needed a fix but at least it would make them work for it. I walked to where I had chained my bike to the fence and looked at the metal chain where it had been cut and the big Master Lock laying on the ground and I decided right then and there that I'd had enough. I was getting out of Detroit.

I reported the theft to the police and a week later a policeman contacted me and said my bike had been found. They had raided a (Black) biker club (gang) garage and arrested some people after finding several stolen bikes. My bike had been taken apart. Jack, my neighbor from my building and I loaded the pieces into his father's pickup truck and took them to Darlene's parents house, where she lived. We put the parts of the bike into the

garage and I told her she could have the bike and she said her youngest brother could put it back together and she would sell it to him. I told her to keep whatever she got for it and I told her I was moving to California.

My dad had given me a black 1959 Ford Galaxie with silver skirts to drive when I turned sixteen and from the time I had graduated high school I was mostly driving the '66 Ford. When I moved to the apartment on the east side he bought another new Ford for the family and gave me the '66. I had a lot of good times in that car. I had consumed and used different substances, gone to parties, concerts and cabarets and spent some beautiful nights on Belle Isle with the windows down and my feet hanging out. I had gotten drunk, in it, gotten sick with my head hanging out of it and had done and had done to me various sexual acts. I had even woke up (came to) early one summer morning in the back seat in my driveway when I had ridden with friends the previous night. Along with the women who rode with me, I had transported drugs and weapons and run from the police.

I had also been in five accidents in that car. Two were minor ones, my fault, and there were also three major ones, only one my fault. The first major one was when a year after graduation I was with my good friend I grew up with, Billy Prince, who would become the lead singer in the R&B group, The Precisions, and we were in a line pulling into a White Castle hamburgers place on Woodward Avenue one summer night in 1967. This spot was where people in 'the game' went to park to see and be seen and young people congregated after leaving the Arcadia Skating Rink down the street. Traffic was backed up at the entrance and we were sitting with a half empty bottle of Seagram's Gin between us waiting to pull forward when a young man's brakes failed, so he yelled, as people snatched him from his car and started to beat him. He had lost control of his car and ran into two parked cars on the street, jumped the curb and hit two other cars, mine being one of them. He hit my right rear side and pushed me through a brick barrier that damaged the left rear side. My car broke the leg of a young man who had been sitting on the wall.

The second major one, a year or so later was when one night I left, at that time, my friend's house across the street and headed to Sealtest. I was drunk and it was raining and I lost control and ran up on the sidewalk and

slid into a fire hydrant and like a can opener it sliced up the right rear side of the car. I drove away with a flat tire and pulled into a side street and went to sleep (passed out) and when I woke up (came to) I drove to the nearest Ford deal to have it fixed. I hadn't called into work and that was one of the times I was fired.

The other major accident, not my fault, was in the summer of 1970. I got off of work one night on my way to a club and I pulled out of the parking lot and when I stopped at the corner red light a man (White) ran into my rear end and almost totaled my car. He was so drunk he could barely walk. Sealtest was in Dearborn, (White) Michigan and the two policemen (White) refused to arrest him or even give him a ticket. We were sitting in the back of the cruiser when I told the police I needed to go to the hospital and the drunk cursed me and threatened me. I was diagnosed with neck and back injuries and missed two weeks of work. I sued the man and eventually got twenty-two hundred dollars after my lawyer (White) got paid. The drunk man's insurance fixed my car. The owner of the auto shop, a friend of my dad, and I inflated the cost of the repairs and we skimmed some of the money and split it between us and his employees.

I wanted to put a down payment on a used white Cadillac Coupe DeVille with my money but my mom squashed that move. She wouldn't let my dad co-sign. I had a friend of mine pick me up and I took a young woman with me who lived down the street from me who thought she liked me but I never thought she really liked me, and I bought a half ounce of cocaine and a pound of weed and six fifths of alcohol and she and I got high. Over the next few weeks I sold some of the drugs, used a lot and drank all of the alcohol with friends and acquaintances. Then I bought some clothes and shoes and basically wasted the rest.

Now, in October, a year and some months later, it was time to let the car go after a little over five years of adventures. I sold it to a childhood friend's younger brother who lived down the street from the family home. I didn't get much of a down payment and he never paid me the rest before the car broke down on him. I quit my job at Sealtest. They seemed relieved to see me go. I began getting rid of everything I could of value,

which wasn't much. I sold my guitar and amp and pistol. I let some things go for free. A friend of mine, Edward, (Black; African American) who everyone called Eddie, who I had grown up with and spent some time with in 'the game' and who had done quite well with the women, found out I was moving and wanted to go. He had recently been armed robbed of his jewelry and he said he was ready to move too. Since I would be in a car instead of flying I kept my small color television and component set and some albums to take with me, along with some clothes. I gave my furnished apartment to Gerry, my schoolmate and acting buddy who had given me my first hit of mescaline and early in the morning of Friday, November 12, 1971, Eddie and I loaded up his 1970 Turquoise Metallic and White, Cadillac Fleetwood Brougham and planning to drive straight through, we then began the nearly two day drive to where I believed I belonged, San Francisco, California.

I didn't know it but I had caught abnormally beautiful weather when Darlene and I were there the previous December. It had been sunny every day with the temperatures in the lower to high sixties. When Eddie and I arrived this mid-November we experienced the reality of San Francisco weather in the fall. It stayed in the fifties in the daytime and in the forties at night and it seemed to drop an unusually damp and chilly rain every day.

I used a Michigan Bankcard, the first credit card I ever had and we stayed in a nice Del Webb Hotel on Market Street near downtown for eight days until we found a relatively inexpensive furnished studio apartment we could rent by the week. Eddie and I had talked about getting a place together and then he started thinking about getting a place of his own and so we rode around looking at studios and one-bedroom places instead of an apartment with two bedrooms. We kept changing our minds about what we liked or didn't like, including the neighborhoods we traveled through. Eddie didn't drink much and rarely used drugs. I could only find some weed to purchase so I drank my way through the days, and nights. We ate turkey TV dinners and watched the Detroit Lions play football on Thanksgiving.

By the end of November Eddie made up his mind he had had enough.

He decided to sell his car and fly back home so he could give his woman, who had helped him buy his car, her share of the money. He got a good price for his car and left. So now I was on my own. I rented a small motorbike and rode, sometimes in the rain, up and down the hills of San Francisco looking at advertised apartments. I had been paying 85 dollars a month rent in Detroit for my little steam heated, one-bedroom place and here a nice studio or not so nice one-bedroom was going for between 240 and 280 dollars a month. I couldn't afford any of the decent places but there was no going back. I sold my small color television to a pawn shop, too heavy, got rid of some clothes, too many, and took a flight down to Los Angeles.

It was December 30. I rented a car at the airport and while driving along Century Boulevard, headed downtown, I saw a club with people going in and coming out who looked to be my age and older. It looked like a nice place. I went in to have a drink and met an older woman (Black; African American). We flirted, had a drink together and laughed and talked. She thought she liked me, a young stranger fresh to the city, and I believed she thought she liked me and we made arrangements to meet the next night in the same place and spend New Year's Eve together.

I drove downtown and got a room at a Sheraton Hotel near Wilshire Boulevard. The next night I brought 1972 in with my new lady friend. We both got drunk and she led me back to my room to spend the night with me. I got sick and threw up in the toilet, passed out on the bed and woke up (came to) next to her with a new year hangover. I talked to the woman, who I really didn't know, a couple of times right after that but never saw my temporary friend again. I don't remember her name.

On my birthday I talked to Darlene and told her what was going on. She flew in two days later and we looked for a place I could afford. She knew where to go and we eventually found an apartment near the Baldwin Hills area close to the two main thoroughfares of La Brea Avenue and Crenshaw Boulevard. It was a nice building in what I considered a nice area, on the corner of Stevely and Pinafore. The area was called 'The Jungle' and I learned it was called that because of the abundant trees and flowers and lush greenery such as palms, banana trees and begonias that

were planted when it was being constructed. I also heard those higher in the nearby hills considered those living in the many apartment complexes below them, savages. It was also the same 'Jungle' that would come to be made infamous from the movie *Training Day* starring Denzel Washington. At that time quite a few of the prominent professional Blacks (African Americans) and well-known persons in the music and movie industry lived up in those hills.

Darlene had the job so after she talked to the landlady (Black; African American} who took care of the building, she put the place in her name and told the landlady we were husband and wife. I gave her enough to pay for the first month and enough for another month that would be used as a security deposit. The landlady balked when she was told I would be the only one living there until Darlene transferred her job so we offered to pay an extra two-month's rent in advance to ensure we got the place. The offer was accepted and we signed the one-year lease.

I was running out of money and I found out later Darlene had pawned two rings to put the utilities and phone in her name. It was a two-bedroom apartment with one and a half baths and a large pool in the middle of the complex. It cost 175 dollars a month. I used my credit card, until I maxed it out, to purchase a waterbed, some sheets and blankets, some kitchen utensils and bathroom towels and toiletries. I bought some groceries and was ready to call the place home, even with no furniture.

I visited Darlene's aunt and uncle with her and met some of her cousins. I was introduced to two of her good friends, a sister and brother, Sarah and Billy, (Black; African Americans) who shared a duplex. We had dinner together and Billy and I drank beer and smoked some of his homegrown weed in the backyard. Two days later Darlene flew back to Detroit. I had no car and no job.

I walked the neighborhood, hung out at a poolroom on Coliseum Street, bought some dollar books on sale at a bookstore, listened to albums on the component set and speakers I had been hauling around, swam in the pool and sat on the rear balcony, drank inexpensive vodka and looked at the mountains in the distance on the days, usually after a rain shower, when the dirty-grey smog wasn't covering them up. I thought about looking for

a job, but I didn't.

I remember distinctly talking to my brother in mid-February and him telling me one day it was 16 degrees in Detroit. It was unusually warm in Los Angeles that same day, 84 degrees and I went swimming. I floated on my back and stared at the blue sky and fluffy white clouds and tried to ignore the nagging reality of my financial situation. By the end of February I had run out of money and went three days with no food, just water. I learned then that fasting, which I had done a couple of times in the past, and not eating for a day or two because pills or cocaine had taken my appetite was different than when forced to go hungry. Plus I couldn't buy any alcohol to drink. Something told me I had some money somewhere so I went through all my clothes and found forty dollars in my white leather jacket I had worn when I rode my motorcycle and a one hundred dollar bill in a pair of pants. I bought some food to eat and some vodka to drink and got drunk.

My friend Eddie, who I had ridden to California with, and who I had been in contact with, decided he was ready to try Los Angeles and in the first week of March he flew out. He stayed with me several days. I talked with the landlady, he brought his move in money, paid three months in advance and moved into the apartment next to me. That evening we went grocery shopping and got a ticket for jaywalking and stopping traffic with our cart. When we told the policeman we didn't know we couldn't cross there and that we were new to California he handed us our tickets and welcomed us to Los Angeles.

About a week later my mom called. My sister was seriously ill and she wanted me to come home. I explained that I couldn't afford it, I wasn't working and that I was going to try and find a job. She said she needed me there and that she would send me the money for a plane ticket. I told her my April rent would be due and she said she would send enough to pay it. Two days later I was back in Detroit.

I spent the first two weeks back home going to the hospital in Ann Arbor, by bus, with my mom. The health situation gradually eased and the third week I went to Wayne State to catch up with old friends and acquaintances. I sat up high in the balcony with Earl D.A. Smith, who was

directing the play *In the Wine Time* by Ed Bullins at the Bonstelle Theatre. Auditions were finishing, rehearsals would soon start and he was trying to talk me into staying and taking the lead role of Steve and I was explaining to him I had no intention of staying in Detroit. I saw a young woman (Black; African American) walk across the stage down below and I was affected by the way she walked and the presence that seemed to emanate from her, even at that distance. I asked Earl who she was and he said her name was Teresa and that she was taking one of the classes he taught and was his assistant, helping him with the play. Then he laughed and looked at me with a sly smile, as only he could, and said something that impressed me. He said she was special and that I should pursue her.

The next weekend I went to a cast party with Darlene and she introduced me to Teresa. She and I talked and I learned everyone called her Tess. I found out she was originally from Birmingham, Alabama and would be graduating within a year. I told her a little of my connection to Wayne State and that I was currently living in Los Angeles. At the end of the evening we exchanged numbers and we started talking every day and I would go to rehearsals and activities related to the play. My sister was back at home and well on her way to recovering and as the end of April approached Tess and I had grown quite close.

When I told her I would soon be returning to California we arranged to spend several nights together in a motel and she said she believed she cared for me and I believed she believed that and I felt something different for her, something I couldn't explain and hadn't experienced before and I told her that and I believed that. My dad gave me the money for my May rent and Tess and I made sincere promises to stay in touch and I returned to 'The Jungle.'

Soon after I got back, Darlene's friend Billy, who I had become friends with, said he was going to Las Vegas and did I want to go? I had him take me to a pawnshop and I pawned my component set and I took my first trip to Sin City so I could play blackjack. I wanted to go to Las Vegas Boulevard and the main strip but Billy, who I found out gambled a lot and liked to shoot craps as well as play blackjack, said the strip was too expensive for us so we went downtown to the casino in the Mint.

I was fortunate (lucky) to win a little over nine hundred dollars. Before we left for home we went to a club called Pigalls on Maryland Parkway. While I was playing a pinball machine a security guard tapped me on my shoulder and pointed out a young woman sitting in a booth with several other young women and said she wanted me to come over. I went to talk with her. She told me her name was Dot. It was Dorothy but everyone called her Dot. She looked and acted like she had some 'game' about her. We found out we both lived in Los Angeles so we exchanged numbers. I believed she liked me and had chosen me so I was going to find out if what I believed, was as I thought.

When I got back to Los Angeles I got my component set out of the pawnshop. I found out where Darlene's rings were and Billy took me there and I got them out and sent them to her along with some money. While I was there I bought an inexpensive Gibson guitar and small amp. I now had enough left to pay my rent for at least a couple more months. I told my landlady Darlene and I had separated. That she didn't want to move to California so we would be getting a divorce. I requested only my name be put on the lease. Eddie had bought a small used Rambler to get around in so I used it to go and have the utilities and phone put in my name.

Dot and I started getting together and I quickly found out she had a connection for weed so I bought a kilo through her for 145 dollars and broke it down to sell small bags. By then I knew a few people in the building who knew people and Eddie had met a few people and Billy and Sarah knew people and I was able to make a profit so I bought another kilo. I met a guy (White) at a neighborhood bar that sold LSD so I started tripping on hallucinogenic substances.

In July, strictly by chance, I ran into Vanessa, who everyone called Van, a young lady (Black; African American) I knew from Detroit, while I was downtown Los Angeles shopping for clothes. We had hung out quite a bit some years before, nothing romantic, and got along well. We talked and she told me Shay was in Los Angeles and she was in contact with her. Shay (Black; African American) was an ex-girlfriend of a close friend, a young man I grew up with. I had known her since I was seventeen years

old and we had been real close. I had heard she moved to California in 1969 but I had no way to contact her. Van took my number and gave it to Shay and we were now in touch. Shay had moved to California with a fairly big time drug dealer so now I had a connection for cocaine.

Business picked up and I bought more furniture and of course some new clothes and shoes. This was California though so I bought more casual clothes and shoes than anything. People I knew didn't dress like I was used to dressing in Detroit. Even in the fall and winter they weren't into tweeds and wools and herringbones materials. It was all jeans and cottons and lighter materials and colors. I thought about buying a car but Dot was working and owned a new Volkswagen and the few I considered close friends all drove and I could get Eddie's Rambler if I absolutely needed transportation so I delayed that move.

It was sometime in August that Cliff Roquemore, from Wayne State Theatre Department moved to Los Angeles from the San Francisco area and got in touch with me. He soon became involved, at a moderate level, in the movie industry and I began to sell weed to him and his fringe actors and actresses crowd. For a while I started going out more to nightclubs and bars with the new people I was meeting but I didn't enjoy it, I had already done so much of that. I backed off of those activities and basically stayed close to my apartment. I drank a lot of alcohol, smoked joints of weed, as if they were cigarettes, and as often as I could, ingested some of the best orange sunshine, purple haze and windowpane acid (LSD) I had ever had and listened to music and played at being a guitar player.

In early September I was driving Eddie's car on Hollywood Boulevard after dropping off a bag of weed. I saw a young woman (White) in a Mercedes stopped next to me at the light. She looked liked she was moving her head rhythmically to some music only she could hear. When the light changed she started off, passed me by and then pulled in front. When we stopped at the next red light I saw her glance in her rearview mirror at me and I licked my tongue out in a slow exaggerated way and smiled and then winked. Her eyes widened and then she smiled back and I motioned for her to pull over.

We talked, exchanged numbers and got together for drinks. Two weeks

later she flew us to Las Vegas for three days. We took LSD, gambled a little and drank a lot. We went to a popular nightclub and while in the bathroom I struck up a conversation with a man (White) named Mark. He invited me and my lady friend to his booth for a drink. He was probably eight to ten years older than me. He had three women (White) with him and it didn't take long for me to recognize and for him to indicate, that they were 'working girls' (prostitutes) and that Mark was in charge. We laughed and talked and had a nice time. My new lady friend and I followed as Mark, sitting in the backseat of a Chevrolet, was driven to his townhouse off of the strip. The whole group stayed up all night partying and I noticed Mark didn't drink alcohol, only Coca-Cola. We exchanged numbers and said we would stay in touch.

Mark and I talked a couple of times and then about two weeks later he brought two of his ladies and a male friend (White) to Los Angeles. He drove his new 1972 white, Lincoln Continental Mark IV to stay with me for three days. He went shopping in Hollywood and we played miniature golf near Disneyland because the happy place was closed. We shot pool at a bowling alley and went to a nightclub to listen to live music. We snorted cocaine that I bought for Mark from Darlene's DJ friend and Mark marveled at how an ounce of cocaine cost more than an ounce of gold. Before he left, he and I, alone together on the balcony, made arrangements for me to fly ounces of cocaine to him in Las Vegas. I flew him dope a half a dozen times over the next four months and then Mark moved to New York. I never saw him again. I never saw that woman again who took me to Vegas either. I don't recall her name.

I do remember on my second trip, after Mark paid me for bringing the drugs in, I stayed up all night gambling and drinking and snorting cocaine in the bathroom at Caesars Palace. I lost just about all my money. I went to my room and passed out. I was staying at the Motel 6 when it cost a little over six dollars a night and the next evening I had him take me from my hotel to Western Union to pick up some money that I had Billy send me. I lied about why I needed to go there, but somehow he knew. After I got the money he rode me around and he took me to areas I had never seen before. I saw large, beautiful homes and he shared with me how he would

ride around and look at the mansions like a young kid secretly looking at expensive toys and planning how he would one day own one. He talked about how he had seen people in his walk of life with way more money than he had, that supposedly had 'game,' come to Vegas and lose everything. He told me Vegas wasn't built on people coming there and winning. Then he said he wasn't taking me to the casino, that he was taking me along with him and his women and we would have a nice meal, see a show and then call it a night.

On one trip Mark took me to one of those large houses to a party to watch Sunday football. It was his uncle's house. Before we left to go he had me separate some of his dope and bag it up so he could take it with him, he said as a gift. When we got there he and his uncle, who he had introduced me to, left and then after a short while they came back and joined the party. It was a mixture of people there, wearing different styles of clothing, along with gold and diamonds on their hands and wrists and around their necks. I met several guests from New Jersey and New York and Florida. It was a lively group with people drinking and talking loudly. We watched football and large bets were made on the outcome of the games and while people ate, the host bragged about how he and his wife and daughter had cooked the lasagna, spaghetti, ravioli and risotto themselves, and baked the ciabatta bread that was being scarfed down.

Mark showed me things and told me things and gave me quite a bit of advice, from small things to large things that I always appreciated, whether I heeded it or not. He told me to always valet park when I could and why he didn't let anyone take his picture. He explained how horse races, professional boxing matches and NFL games were often fixed and when I asked him why he never drank alcohol he said it was because alcohol was poison.

In the months after my returning to California, Tess and I had stayed in touch. We talked on the phone on occasions but stayed connected by continuously writing passionate love letters full of hope about a future together after she graduated with her B.A. Darlene and I also stayed in touch. We talked on the phone, but not often, and I saw her a couple times when she came to Los Angeles. It was obvious we were drifting apart and

we both knew it.

Dot stayed upset with me and my actions or lack of actions toward her and threatened to shoot me and herself if I didn't start treating her better. In mid-October she halfheartedly pulled a gun on me and I had to snatch it from her and throw it under the bed after taking the bullets out. I wanted to leave her alone because I thought she was having mental and emotional problems but right before November she got physically sick and was hospitalized and I had to stay in the relationship with her until she was better. She was in the hospital for almost two weeks and lost her job. When she got out she decided to move to San Diego to live with her sister.

I flew to Detroit for Thanksgiving for five days to see my family and Tess. She and I talked seriously about her moving to Los Angeles to live with me while she went to U.C.L.A. to work towards a Master's Degree in African Studies. I went back determined to keep my life as uncomplicated as possible. I cut loose the last young lady I was dealing with and by the end of the year I was no longer involved with anyone. I had backed off selling anything but weed and Mark had made his move to the east coast. I brought the new year in getting high in my apartment. Eddie stopped by for a drink before going out and I talked to people to wish them a prosperous upcoming year but I stayed in. On the second of January I was still high when I turned 24 years old.

By the end of January Tess had made the move to Los Angeles and we began our attempt to live together. I finally started looking for a job and found one in mid-February. I got it from a newspaper ad. It was at an art gallery on La Cienega near Santa Monica Boulevard. In the front area reproductions of famous artworks and some original paintings by one of the female owners were sold. In the rear of the building, in the warehouse work area, reproductions of paintings on a canvas material were stretched, framed and shipped all over the country and even overseas. I was making a little less than two dollars an hour.

I actually put the paintings together. From the order sheet an address label was created, the canvas was pulled by an employee, with the proper frame being put with it and set on a table behind me. While standing, I would take the canvas and a wooden insert and line up one end and set the

canvas on a metal desk-like platform on a machine and press on a pedal at my right foot and with a hissing sound a part of the machine, similar to a metal bar, would slide forward and staple the canvas to the wood. Turning the painting to the other end I would stretch the canvas as tight as I could, press the pedal and staple the other end. I would then do the sides, cut off any excess canvas with a large sharp blade connected to a cutting board and then using a large staple gun I would secure the painting inside the frame.

I did this for eight hours a day, five days a week with weekends off. I got thirty minutes for lunch and two fifteen minute breaks. The first two months I took two busses there and back and then a young man was hired who lived in my direction and he started dropping me off within walking distance of the apartment.

Tess got a job in Hollywood as an executive secretary and personal assistant to John Levy, known as being the first Black (African American) personal manager in jazz. His clients included Ahmal Jamal, Ramsey Lewis, Freddie Hubbard, Herbie Hancock, Nancy Wilson, Joe Williams, Cannonball Adderly, Wes Montgomery and the list went on. Tess met and got to know several of these jazz greats.

She quickly bought a new compact Datsun and within months began her studies at U.C.L.A. I worked my job and continued to do what I did best. I drank alcohol, smoked weed and occasionally dropped pills (bennies; whites) and every now and then took LSD. I still fooled around with my guitar. Tess drank very little, occasionally and quite causally smoked weed and took LSD with me a few times, for her, cocaine was out.

It took me until late summer before I started taking blank labels home and typing addresses on them of my friends and relatives and having pictures sent to them. I sent my mom two large beautiful reproductions of Vincent Van Gogh that I put in the most expensive, simulated-gold-painted, wood and cloth beveled frames. One painting was Village Street in Auvers and the other was Fishing Boats on the Beach at Saintes-Maries.

I met a woman (Black; African American) who wanted to open her own art gallery in West Pasadena. I had several hundred dollars worth of

paintings sent to her, charged her for some, gave her most of them. Then in early November I quit the job, I had had enough.

That which had existed between Tess and I was gradually changing as she became more comfortable in California. The alterations were so subtle they were barely noticed throughout the holiday season, but we both knew there was something, not just missing but also something else there that we didn't (couldn't) see.

Tess and I used tickets John Levy had given her, to go to a theater and see Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier fight on January 28, 1974. Less than a week later Tess told me she was moving in with a lady friend of hers who lived in Hollywood. The move was inevitable. We both had sensed it, knew it was coming. We didn't discuss it. I didn't attempt to dissuade her. There were a dozen or more reasons it happened, some we could have pointed to, most we couldn't have expressed. There were faults and reasons, to be revealed, more mine than hers. I played B.B. King's record *The Thrill is Gone* over and over again as she packed her belongings.

Our relationship, a fantasy formed through separation, created from our idealistic spoken words of enduring love and everlasting fidelity and built on written words that expressed our most intimate personal thoughts and feelings was a relationship that could not withstand the test of reality. Our living together meant, that which we had once had would never be that, in that form, again. I was 25 and she was 23.

By March I was thinking about finding another place to live. It would be a new start somewhere, not just different but better and away from the lingering presence of Tess. I was already disenchanted with 'The Jungle' after a little over two years. I heard a good friend of mine I had grown up with, actually Shay's old boyfriend, was getting married in early April to his girlfriend of many years, who I knew quite well, so I began making preparations to go to the wedding. I started getting rid of some personal things, throwing away clothes and such and then gave notice to my landlady. I sold some of my furniture and gave away the rest. I bought an old, full-length mink coat from Peter, an acquaintance and friend of Darlene's I had met soon after moving to California. He sold all different things at a flea market on the weekends. I then bought two pounds of weed

and sewed it into the lining. Then finally, I pawned my component set, guitar and amp. The plan was not to be gone too long. On April 18, I flew back to Detroit.

I surprised people, including the bride and groom when I showed up at the wedding. I partied at the reception and reconnected with old friends and classmates and danced and flirted with several former female flings. Over the next few weeks I sold all the weed that wasn't smoked and then sent Tess enough money and made arrangements for her to buy two more pounds. Marijuana was around 185 dollars a kilo by then so I wired her 250 and she was to send the package to me by Greyhound for pickup. I know she bought it, the dealer told me she got it. I had her use a phony address but when I called the station it hadn't arrived when it was supposed to. I had her send me the receipt but too much time had passed and I was too apprehensive to press the matter by going to the Greyhound station and inquiring so I had to let it go.

Now I was back in Detroit and running out of money. Not only that I was back around friends and acquaintances I had known most of my life and also people I had hung out in the streets with. By late spring I discovered my mom and dad were having marital problems. He was having affairs, which I later learned he had done before, on numerous occasions, and my mom was finally fed up with him. My sister had just graduated from high school and my mom felt, after thirty years, it was the time to end the marriage. When she asked my advice I told her I would support whatever she decided to do and she began the process of divorce. My dad moved out.

I floated through the summer and early fall in limbo, hanging out some, not doing much. I didn't know what I wanted to do next but I knew where I wanted to be. Through a lady friend of mine I had grown up with and had hung out in 'the game' with I met a dope-dealing woman six years older than me. She thought she liked me but I never thought she really thought she liked me. I was just someone to play with, but she impressed me and for a while I thought I liked her.

She drove a new light-blue Thunderbird and sold fairly decent amounts of cocaine in small quantities. She had heart and she had game, was well

known, didn't have a man and all that made her dangerous. As the weather grew colder I would ride with her on deliveries and we would both wear our fur coats and go to clubs and after-hours joints. She drank cognac (Martell; Hennessy; Rémy Martin; Courvoisier) so I started buying and drinking it too and I snorted her dope with her. She didn't smoke weed but I did and occasionally found some bootleg Black Beauties (uppers) to drop. Hallucinogenics were not to be found.

The pimps and dope dealers were after her and they looked at me sideways and talked to me out of the sides of their necks and I had no backup, no crew. I remembered and recognized that, that game was not just old but dead. I felt threatened and so I started telling her more and more often that I was busy when she wanted to get with me and I was able to slowly move away from her and she left me alone.

In late November I flew back to California and stayed a week with Tess, who still was living in Hollywood with her roommate (female). She and I talked about my remaining there, living with her for a while until I decided what to do next. I sat on her balcony at night and looked at all the buildings and lights seemingly blinking and stretching into the distance until they disappeared. I didn't feel comfortable about her suggestion. By then she had been extensively involved with promoting the Muhammad Ali and George Foreman fight in Zaire, that had just been held on October 30. I had seen pictures of her taken in the United States and in Africa that were in Jet Magazine and Ebony Magazine with three other young women posing and feigning throwing punches while wearing two-piece bathing suits and over-sized boxing gloves. I remembered what Earl had said as we sat in the dimness of that balcony in 1972. He had said she was special. I didn't think it was possible for us to be together again. For me it was reaffirmed that our time had passed. Again, it was a painful realization. To ease that ache I told myself, and tried to believe my mom and sister needed me at the house. I had been paying on my things in the pawnshop but now I sold my guitar and amp back to the owner and boxed up my component set and prepared to fly back to Detroit.

My plan became to go back and let the family situation settle into whatever it was going to be. I would get myself together, rise up and move

back to Los Angeles. I was going back home but not to live there. A week after I got back I sat in the living room and watched TV. I could pull the shade back and see the snow swirling and falling downward and sideways past the corner streetlight. Beginning Sunday morning December 2 it snowed almost 24 hours straight. It snowed 18.9 inches. I shoveled it.

I looked at three directions I felt I could go in order to get back out West. When I briefly considered getting back in the streets and selling drugs I reminded myself why I wanted to leave that life behind and that in Detroit that avenue was closed. I recalled being at Kaline's, an after-hours joint, with the dope lady and seeing a man I hadn't seen in several years. I knew him as Frank Nitty and called out that name to acknowledge him. He hurried over to me and quietly, urgently corrected me. He told me his name was George, that I should call him George. I remembered how two Frank Nittys had been killed and one had been chopped into pieces. George didn't want to be Frank Nitty any longer and I didn't want to go back that way in a place that in 1974 had been dubbed the murder capital of the U.S.A. and the arson capital of America.

Another direction I could go was back to school and get my B.A. degree, although I didn't know in what field it would be. In January of 1975 I took a bus in the cold to Wayne State and went through the process of getting my transcripts. Several times that month I went back and eventually spoke to an academic advisor and we went over my records. I found out I still had prerequisites I needed to complete and of course I should decide on a major.

I remembered a speech professor (White) I had as a freshman and sophomore. I had written several essays he had critiqued and we had had in-depth discussions and debates about life, racial issues, politics and other current events. He was similar to a mentor and had encouraged me and supported me. In early 1971 he had contacted me and said he possibly could get me a position teaching at a university in Chicago while I worked on my Master's degree. When I explained I wasn't close to graduating he was disappointed and didn't understand. I explained that over the years I had quit school several times, dropped requirements along the way and eventually started taking acting classes.

He had once discussed with me the path to becoming a professor and the academic road he had taken. He said I needed to get a B.A. or B.S., then a Master's degree and I should then get a PhD. After that I would need to publish papers in my chosen field. Times had changed quickly and dramatically from the years 1966 to 1975. Had I gone straight through and graduated in 1970 or 1971 I could have gotten a fairly well paying job with a basic degree. Companies were hiring qualified people of color and different ethnic groups because there was a need to have a certain amount for various political and social reasons and it was becoming a well-known fact it was just good business. Now, in 1975, Blacks (African Americans) could be chosen from a larger pool of males and females and were in competition with other minority groups. Those of color who once mainly gravitated, and were usually pointed toward teaching, human services and social fields were now striving toward getting degrees in engineering and fields of science and also focusing more on becoming lawyers and doctors. A person needed a Master's degree at the least. People with liberal arts degrees were driving buses and working for the postal service, a stable government job. I couldn't get excited about the challenges of school. The final direction was work. I decided to get a job.

I found an employment placement service in the newspaper and went in and signed an agreement to give them a percentage of my pay for a specific length of time if they found me a job. They got me a full time position in March of 1975 in downtown Detroit at what was at that time the Detroit Bank and Trust. I was an encoder in the data processing department. With an encoding machine, similar to a ten key adding machine, I would key in numbers that would be placed on bank documents such as checks, deposit and withdrawal slips by magnetic ink when run through my machine. The documents could then be read and information recorded when run through a reader and sorter machine. I worked the afternoon shift. The pay was slightly above minimum wage, which meant I was making a little more than three dollars an hour.

There were almost two dozen-people in my immediate area, male and female, White and Black. Most of the employees were around my age, some younger, a few older, with the supervisors being ten to twenty years

older than me with a couple near retirement age. I took a bus, sometimes two buses to and from work and then after a few months I paid a co-worker (Black) who worked my shift and who lived not far from me to pick me up and drop me off.

By early June I was going to a nearby bar with a group of co-workers for lunch and most of us drank alcohol. Sometimes I took the bus downtown early and met my brother at a bar or at the barbershop where he hung out and I would drink heavily before work. I got so drunk once I passed out on the toilet, pants up, in the bathroom stall and my immediate supervisor came in and called my name and said if I wasn't feeling well I could go home. His voice woke me up (I came to) and I told him I was all right. I threw some cold water on my face and went back to work. He was a heavy drinker and sometimes came to work under the influence himself and I knew, others knew and he knew we all knew, so he let me and others slide by.

One of my female (White) co-workers, a little younger than me, on occasions had access to Quaaludes and LSD and of course weed was always available. I got with several women (White; Black) on my floor, on the floors above and below me and two of the tellers from the ground floor bank but these were all flings, transitory affairs and most strongly suspected that and accepted that and I knew it. I had no plans to become seriously involved with anyone because it was still my intentions to save my money, buy a car and drive back to California.

In late August a position opened up in the computer area and I took a test, went through the interview process and was promoted to computer operator, with a significant raise, still working afternoons, five days a week. At that time DB&T was running large mainframe computers made by Burroughs to process the bulk of the work. In those days paper punch cards, microfiche film and reel tapes were also being utilized on NCR and IBM machines.

I painted and put carpet in the basement, decorated the bathroom and put drapes on the windows. I wallpapered the bathroom and the room that had once been the coal bin. My dad had made it into a bedroom for himself so he could get away from the noise of his three children and get

some sleep. I put mirrors on the walls. I settled in as winter approached and as it grew cold I calculated it would be almost two years before I could be gone from there.

I used my sister's car quite often and rode with lady friends, old friends and Melvin, who everyone called Mel, a co-worker (Black; African American) I had become good friends with. Mel didn't smoke weed too often and he didn't take pills but he drank more than me so that's why we hit it off so well. I went to clubs and parties but I stayed away from the hard streets and only occasionally went to an after-hours joint. I bought some new clothes and of course some shoes and after giving my mom some money I was still able to save enough money each month to stay on plan. That's how I made it through 1975 and for my 27th birthday in January of 1976 I snorted some cocaine, smoked some weed and got drunk.

That's what I did the first part of the new year. I snorted a little, smoked a lot, drank a lot and took pills on occasions. I bought weed from Gerry, my buddy from my theater days and throughout the spring sold bags of weed to my immediate friends and a select few of my co-workers. I did a lot of partying and going to nightclubs and downtown bars.

On Saturday night, July 3, 1976, Mel had a party at his apartment in the clubhouse to celebrate the 200th birthday of the United States of America. A female (Black; African American) friend of his had flown in from Atlanta, Georgia and she was helping out behind the bar. Her name was Beatrice, everyone called her Bea and she and I talked, had a drink together and went our separate ways. There was no way to know she would play a significant role in my life in a little over two years.

In November, a week before Thanksgiving I was supposed to go downtown to a fashion show with the young woman I was seeing at that time but she felt ill that day and urged me to go without her so I did. I was standing just inside of the entrance of the nightclub, after presenting my ticket and signing the guest book when I saw a nicely dressed woman (White) enter alone and I watched as she handed in her ticket and signed the registry. I commented on how pretty her lipstick was and smiled and she thanked me and returned the smile. I asked if she wanted to join me

for a drink. She accepted and we found a table. She sipped on a glass of red wine and I had several glasses as we conversed and watched the show.

We looked into each other's eyes as we laughed and talked and flirted. But for me there was nothing gleaned from what I saw and I have no idea what she may have seen. Nothing, I believe could have possibly portended for us what lay ahead in the future. Perhaps, at the bottom of our coming together was simply the cold outside and the impending winter and the relationships in which we were both involved. I was partially alone and she was alone, neither joined with, nor even tenuously connected to anyone in particular, so she said. A Detroit winter was not the time to be out and about trying to find someone to help keep them warm. Winter was the time to be coupled-up and holding on. After the show I followed her home and we spent the night together.

Her name was Anne, she was called Annie. She was 32 years of age, five year older than me and had a daughter (biracial) nine years of age. Her daughter was named Brittany who was only sometimes called Britt. Annie was working downtown at Blue Cross, Blue Shield as an executive secretary.

Within weeks I was taking a bus from work that dropped me off near her townhouse and I would walk a block and a half to stay with her and her daughter, who was usually asleep when I got there. At first I only did that a few times a week and then I began spending more and more time there. Annie drank alcohol, only occasionally, and didn't smoke weed. I smoked, but not around Brittany and only drank moderately in their presence.

It was an unusually harsh winter, the upstairs was cold and on quite a few occasions the three of us would bundle up and put blankets on the floor and sleep on the floor in the kitchen, using the heat from the oven in an attempt to stay warm. We went through the winter like that, the three of us together. It was like a battle, us against the elements. We were in it together, this journey, this adventure, and that's how we grew closer. I especially grew closer to Brittany and she to me. She had a fiery personality and an independent streak and the battles between the mother and daughter seemed to be eased by my presence and conflicts appeared to

subside when I was able to exert my influence. I was like a buffer between them. I began to feel as if these two individuals needed me. They needed my comfort, my guidance, my protection. I ignored the fact that they had been living as they chose to live before I came into their lives.

Annie knew of my California plans but one of the aspects of that move we both refused to acknowledge was that my plan and its influence on our lives would eventually have to be dealt with so we rarely talked about the progress of that plan. We went through a chaotic holiday season, especially Christmas. Annie and Brittany fought over everything, even the Christmas decorations on the tree. Of course I had to meet her family and she met mine. We made it, barely, and I began looking forward to spring. I brought the new year in with Annie at her place with a few of her friends and that next night I went out and got high and drunk with my friends for my 28th birthday. It was early March when Annie told me she was pregnant.

This news altered my mind and my emotions. Brittany had already begun to cling to me when I was around. She had gone from asking me when was I leaving to, if she could go too? Now I thought about how I was 28 years old with no children, that I knew of, and had never been married. For several weeks I wrestled with what should I do, if I could change my plans? Different scenarios ran through my head. Maybe they could join me in California. With the baby it would be four of us, maybe five later, a family. Then Annie told me she wasn't pregnant, it was a mistake (lie?). I was relieved but my misgivings and sense of guilt remained when I realized I would still be leaving the two of them alone in Detroit. I worried about Brittany.

Annie and I began to talk seriously about the two of them coming to California. She said she would (could) and that she could transfer her job. I began to think about how expensive Los Angeles was, how we could pool our resources and together improve our lives, the three of us. I explained to her how we could make that happen and then she informed me how I would have to make a commitment. She wouldn't uproot herself and her daughter without us being married.

Since February Shay had been sending me the Sunday classified so I

could look at the job market in the computer operations field. In late March I found three potential jobs and mailed my résumés. I received two responses so I took a week's vacation and flew out. I stayed with Shay and went on two interviews. I was offered one job at a modest raise and given a month to return and begin work so I accepted immediately.

Back in Detroit I told Annie about the job offer and suggested that we get married and she accepted. Tess and I had remained in touch and in the past had promised each other we would let the other know of the impending event, even though we were no longer together, if either of us ever decided to get married. She had completed her work toward her Master's degree, taken her second extended trip to Africa and was again living in California. She was contemplating starting work on a PhD. I called her, told her I was getting married and she congratulated me and wished me well and thanked me for letting her know.

I called Shay and shared the news of the coming wedding. She didn't congratulate me or wish me well or attempt to dissuade me but she said something I would never forget as long as I could remember it and I felt something I would feel as long as I could feel it after the feeling followed the memory of her words. She said what I was about to do was fine, as long as I loved her.

In order for me to understand and believe in a truth it's imperative that I not only know it to be true but also feel it, experience it as true. The falsity of my emotions and my motives was palpable and washed through all of my being as an ominous wave

I had accepted a computer operator position at Forest Lawn Memorial Park, a cemetery, in Glendale, California. They had purchased a credit union with several branches and were running Burroughs computers to process their work. Their computers were not the same models as Detroit Bank and Trust, they were slightly smaller and not as powerful, closer to what would be called mid-range but they functioned the same way and also used the same commands to direct them. I would be working the graveyard shift at the graveyard.

A week after I returned I gave my two-weeks notice at the bank and a week later, on my lunch break, Annie and I went to the old courthouse in

Highland Park to be married in front of my mother, my sister, Brittany, and two of Annie's close friends (female Black and male White). This one man had two cases that had to be tried and the judge took so long to marry us that when I returned to work I had been fired. My supervisor thought I had left the job for good, a week early. They paid me the vacation time and sick time I had coming and my employment at DB&T was over.

Annie had totaled her car in February, I never found out exactly how, and like me was sometimes taking the bus to work or getting a ride from someone and Brittany was walking to and from the nearby school to her babysitter's house. My now wife had a good friend who was a salesman at a Chevrolet dealership so I used some of the money I had saved, to make a down payment and was able to finance the rest of the 5,800 dollar price and I purchased a 1977 Firethorn Red Camaro. I left the car with Annie and Brittany and flew to California to start my new job and begin my new life. I would come back and get my family when school was out in June.

Shay was living alone at that time so I stayed at her house in her spare bedroom. I took two buses from Los Angeles, one to downtown and the other one to Glendale and then walked three blocks to work. The trip home was the same, of course just the opposite direction. It was my first time working around, and directly with such a diverse group of people. On my shift there was a young man, Hiro, from Japan, a young man, Robert (Black; African American) from Watts, a young man, John, (White) from Glendale and a young man, Roque, from Mexico.

I also worked near the final resting spots of Humphrey Bogart, Nat King Cole, Sam Cooke, Dorothy Dandridge, Errol Flynn and Clark Gable. Forest Lawn would also be the future final homes of Sammy Davis Jr., Natalie Cole, Robert "Iceberg Slim" Beck, Elizabeth Taylor, Johnny "Guitar" Watson, Bobby Womack, Michael Jackson and James "J Dilla" Yancey. Outside of the computer room it was relatively dark, and peaceful.

In June I flew back to Detroit to relocate my new wife and new daughter. Annie had sold everything she could, gave away the rest and boxed up clothes, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, and other household items that we would ship before we left. We had a small reception, at Annie's

insistence, in a friend of mine's backyard that for a short while turned into something special. Billy Prince, of The Precisions singing group, who was there, was working at an in-patient mental health facility and I had met Brad (White) a friend of his I would sometimes buy weed from. We ran out of ice so I went to the store to buy more. When I came back there was a large yellow van sitting in the driveway and I could see some people sitting in it with several of them hanging out of the windows and waving at guests as they passed by. I recognized the name on the van and assumed Brad had come by to pay his respects and say farewell. When I got to the backyard there was an obvious change of mood and when I saw Annie's face I looked around and gradually realized Brad had brought half a dozen of the patients to the backyard with him, I assume to grab a bite to eat. At first I couldn't believe it, and then I remembered how Brad was. He and his people didn't stay long and I made him take some food for those he left in the van. It made for a memorable reception. Two days later we loaded up the car and began the nearly 2,300 mile ride to our new home.

We started early on a Friday morning, before the sun came up. My second cross-country trip, their first. Annie and Brittany had sandwiches for breakfast as I drove a few hours and then we stopped for a bathroom break, to stretch our legs and for a short rest. We started again and not being used to driving my own car I got pulled over for speeding. I apologized to the policeman (White) for going too fast, told him that I hadn't driven the new car on the highway before and explained I was moving my family to California. He leaned in to look at Annie and Brittany and he could see items piled in the back seat. He went to his cruiser to check my driver's license and registration and when he came back he was thinking about what to do when Brittany started begging the nice policeman not to give her daddy a ticket. He let me go with a verbal warning, told me to slow down, be more careful, and he wished me luck.

After a few more hours it was lunchtime. On the way out of the restaurant I told Annie it was her turn to drive for a while and she said she couldn't drive. When I asked her what she meant, that she couldn't drive, she said she had a phobia and couldn't drive on the highway. Brittany confirmed she couldn't drive and showed me a small scar on her forehead

where Annie had, a few years in the past, an accident and Brittany had been injured, so I drove on. We had to stop at a motel that evening with a pool so Brittany could swim. The next day was more of the same. We had breakfast before we got on the road, bathroom break, lunch and then rest stop and bathroom break and finally a motel with a pool. Each time we stopped they bought things like games and toys for Brittany to play with in the back seat and of course, souvenirs. It took me two days to get through Texas. It was late night on Monday when we got to Los Angeles. I drove all the way.

I had taken some letterhead stationery from work and used a typewriter in my supervisor's office to create an official looking letter that falsified my length of time on the job and my total income. I forged the signature of my supervisor and used the document to rent a two-bedroom apartment in the Tara Hill complex in Culver City. I chose that place because a very good friend of mine I had grown up with, singer, musician and producer, Spyder Turner, lived there with his wife and young son and young daughter. Spyder and his family had moved there from Detroit and had been there almost a year. He had moved there to work with his friend, writer and producer Norman Whitfield. He vouched for me with the rental agent but I got the impression she wasn't really concerned. She just wanted to rent the unit. The rent was 400 dollars a month.

Within days of our arrival Annie found out her transfer did not and would not go through so she was without a job. Our only source of income came from my job and we had no furniture including no refrigerator. For a week we all slept on the floor and used a cooler and bought ice. Then we bought two beds, used the cooler for another two weeks and then bought a refrigerator. We still had no furniture.

I would work from eleven at night until seven thirty in the morning and then, with traffic, take over forty-five minutes to get home. I had to take Annie on job searches, with Brittany coming along, and then she got a temporary position in late July. With Annie working days I had to watch Brittany most of the day since school was out for the summer and I had to pick Annie up after she got off work. Brittany spent a good deal of time with Spyder's family because his daughter and son were close to her age

but even with them helping out I was still sleep deprived.

Brittany seemed to settle in. There were plenty of kids around her age to play with and there were two pools and she enjoyed swimming. Annie had trouble adjusting. She wasn't that close with her immediate family but she missed her routine and her friends. She only knew the people I knew until she met a few people in the complex and at her job. For her, the considerable sacrifices she had to make, along with the dramatic changes in lifestyle affected her greatly. The cultural differences between Detroit and Los Angeles were obvious and she didn't particularly care for sunny, smoggy, expansive, crowded California.

School started in September and late that month Annie got a permanent position at Hughes Aircraft, not far from where we lived, as an executive secretary. She wasn't making quite the salary she had made at her previous job and the cost of living in significant ways was higher and so even with our combined incomes we struggled financially.

Annie bought a large mirrored dining room table and four bamboo chairs that looked like thrones and also purchased living room, bedroom, and kitchen furniture along with a television and other appliances on credit she somehow talked a story manager (male White) into giving us. The patio looked like a tropical garden, a jungle even, with all the plants she bought and of course she bought clothes for herself and her daughter.

She constantly called home and the phone bill was outrageous. She wrote checks without the money in the bank and even told me one time when I got on her about buying something I didn't think we needed and spending money that we didn't have she said that she didn't spend any money, she had written a check. By November I was drinking heavily and my wife was alluding to me being an alcoholic. I would take walks to smoke and when I came back I became the returning pothead. I had to hide my vodka bottle or Brittany would take it and pour the alcohol in the toilet.

Our first Thanksgiving and Christmas together as a family in California were monetary and emotional disasters. Annie and Brittany's conflicts had escalated. They argued all the time, about everything, and we all stayed tense. At Thanksgiving, instead of us going out for dinner, as I suggested,

Annie insisted on buying all the food and cooking everything herself. She became overwhelmed and ruined one dish and burnt another. When it was almost time to eat Brittany came skipping in and Annie told her to get ready for dinner and Brittany said she wasn't hungry that she had already eaten. When Annie asked her how she could have already eaten she said Martha, Spyder's wife, had fed her spaghetti and she was full. Annie had a fit and I had to stop her from going after both Brittany and Martha.

Christmas was worse than Thanksgiving because of the separation from home and the friends and family there and the financial strain we put ourselves under. Annie overspent and was frustrated she couldn't spend more. She wanted things to be as they had been for years in Detroit at that time of year and had even shipped all her Christmas decorations and the large artificial tree she had bought years before. Some of the decorations had been broken and she fussed about that as I helped her put the tree together. I went out for a while and when I came back Brittany was lying on the floor watching as Annie decorated the tree. I asked why she wasn't helping and she said Annie never let her help with the tree ornaments and Annie said Brittany would mess it up and the tree wouldn't look right. It was my turn to have a fit and Annie ended up locked behind the bedroom door and Brittany and I ended up decorating the tree, just ourselves.

The New Year came and we tried, as a family, to celebrate. But I didn't go anywhere, didn't do much. We all hoped, in our own ways, the coming year would be better than the previous one. My birthday seemed strange and dull because I had never before been in a situation like I was in and my new age didn't enthuse me and neither did it impress me as some significant milestone.

By mid-January of 1978 me, the 29-year-old father, was going to Brittany's school at least once every other week to speak with her teachers or the principal. She had quickly progressed from bullying and basically terrorizing the kids in the complex, her age and some older, I would learn they called her "tough Britt," to fighting, beating, and choking her classmates, male and female. Annie and her cute little daughter's verbal confrontations and threats came more frequently and became borderline physical assaults on both their parts.

In early February, at Annie's insistence and prodding, the two of us went to a counseling center at a hospital so we could be evaluated and referred to a marriage counselor. While we were speaking with a doctor a man in the room next to us began to holler incoherently and bang on the table and walls. I could hear footsteps in the hallway and the struggle and voices as he was being restrained. I could also hear his anger and anguish and it was as if I myself could feel his pain and for the first time in many years I began to cry. My thoughts rushed me and I thought of the situation in which I had put myself. All the sacrifices I had made were for nothing and all my plans had been destroyed by me alone, there was no one else to blame. I thought of this woman who sat beside me with an unusual look on her face (compassion? confusion? disgust?). This was a stranger who I had uprooted, along with her daughter, who was also a stranger to me and I was a stranger to them and we were all strangers to each other and I realized I had falsely believed I cared about them but had always known yet denied to myself that I never loved them. What I had done was altered the course of their lives and placed them in emotional, psychological and physical danger and if I didn't consciously think those specific thoughts I most definitely felt them.

For a while I struggled to stop crying and when my wife touched my shoulder and then lightly rubbed my back I cried harder, quietly, sobbed uncontrollably, and then the doctor rose to get me a cup of water and the sound of his voice, when he asked me if I would be all right, if there was anything else he could get me, if I could sip some of the water, the sound, the words, the questions brought me back and took me away from where I was. I caught my breath and gasped for air and then I sipped the water and wiped at my face with the tissues the doctor handed me. I didn't know then I was attempting to wipe away guilt and shame and fear and anger and then, like a spell, it was over and I felt a momentary resigned emptiness.

We went to a marriage counselor (White) near where we lived once a week through February and most of March and as April approached the counselor said we had made significant progress, wished us luck and released us. His wish of luck, the inflection in his voice, the way he said it

reminded me of the sympathetic policeman who gave me the warning. From the beginning while we were sitting there in those sessions speaking the words we were supposed to be saying I was making plans to leave this woman and her (my) daughter and possibly even relocating, maybe to Northern California where my friend Eddie had moved.

Annie and Brittany, to me were wasteful and fed the garbage disposal large amounts of what I considered to be good food. I ate the leftovers before they could be disposed of to cut down on that waste and gained so much weight I couldn't fit in most of my pants. I kept bursting my favorite pair in the seam at the back and having them fixed at my cleaners until the owner said he didn't think I could wear them any longer. In February, right after we started counseling I started fasting for two and three days at a time, drinking only water, once I did that for four days. I was determined and by the end of March my weight was very near where I wanted it to be.

Through the connections I had established, beginning in 1972, and new connections and casual acquaintances I had made, I had already decided in January to sell, on occasions, a pound or two of marijuana. I didn't want the traffic of selling ounces or smaller amounts so I didn't try to do too much. A pound of higher quality weed cost between 300 and 400 dollars and a kilo was out of the picture. With my markup the profit margin was small but in the past I had always sold what I used and once I decided to leave my family I looked at moving larger quantities and possibly having someone else flip cocaine for me that I could get through Shay.

In early April I talked with Mel, my former co-worker from Detroit Bank and Trust. We had stayed in touch and had even talked about him taking his first trip to California to visit me. In this particular conversation he said he was going to Atlanta, Georgia to visit his friend, the young lady who I had met at his party in 1976. He suggested I meet him there for a few days and gave me the dates and I told him I would consider it.

At around this same time, Frank, a friend of mine from high school who lived in the Leimert Park area, who I had had dealings with before, began getting quantities of marijuana, 10 to 20 pounds at a time. My co-worker, Roque had me start to bring anywhere from two to five pounds to work every three or four days and we would go to his house nearby and

transact the sale with his associates. I used part of the first proceeds to help Annie by a used Chevrolet Vega.

In late April a friend (acquaintance) of mine I had hung out with on 12th Street and in the joints in the '60s came to California on job related business and got in touch with me. His name was Rodney but had been given the street name of Poindexter or Poinsy. He wore the similar round glasses and favored the cartoon character in Felix the Cat. He didn't try to pimp or sell drugs he just stood on the sidewalk or in the doorways high off of beans (uppers) and talked fast to everyone in elaborate sentences and using big words as he expounded about philosophy and the meaning of life and other heavy subjects.

Rodney worked as a salesman for IBM and after the conference and meetings were complete I went downtown to pick him and his bags up. I had Annie meet us at a restaurant for after work happy-hour snacks and drinks. Poinsy had three of his friends he knew from Detroit meet him there. It would be my first time meeting them. Poinsy gave me a brief description of each and I would add to his information and find out more about them later. There was Chuck a hustler involved in real estate, Baby Ray an ex-pimp who owned two women's clothing stores and Fish, a mid-level drug dealer and con man.

We were all sitting there talking and drinking and snacking and after a while Annie pulls Poinsy to the side and begins to speak earnestly to him in a private conversation that ends after a short period of time. On my way to the restroom Poinsy hurries to catch up with me and while we're in there he tells me my wife has just told him, in no uncertain words, that I was crazy, an alcoholic, a drug addict and had ruined her life and her daughter's life too. When Annie sees the look on my face as I break from the restroom with Poinsy behind me she heads for the exit. I catch her by the back of her neck before she gets out and take her through the doorway. Outside Poinsy grabs me, restrains me and she gets free, runs to her car and takes off. Later I find out she's picked up Brittany from the babysitter and gone to stay the night at a girlfriend's house. I called in sick at work and Poinsy and I went out clubbing that night.

That was a Friday. Annie and Brittany stayed away so I had Poinsy

spend the weekend with me. He crashed on the couch. He had never had Coors beer before and wanted some so we bought two cases, a cooler and some ice and we rode around visiting people all day Saturday during the day and went to listen to live music that night. We continued visiting on Sunday and hung out at a bar that afternoon. Sunday evening when I took Rodney to the airport all the beer was gone. I didn't even like Coors. While Poinsy was flying back to Detroit I was packing my car with my things so I could leave my wife and daughter.

I got a room at a motel in Glendale and got in touch with Mel, confirmed he was still going to Atlanta and made arrangements to meet him there and I put in for a week's vacation. I avoided talking to Annie or seeing Brittany and five days after leaving Tara Hill I flew to Atlanta, Georgia. It was my first trip there. I would spend four days and four nights.

The young lady Mel was staying with, Beatrice, known as Bea, had been born in Atlanta, was three years older than me and was single with an eleven-year-old daughter. She was a head accountant for a fairly large business in downtown Atlanta and also did the books for two smaller businesses. She was a college graduate with degrees in accounting and business administration. She lived in Fairburn, a suburb of Atlanta not far from the airport. She owned a four bedroom, three and half bath home with a large front and back yard. She was considered upper middle class and her home cost in the mid to high forty thousands, which was half as much as an average home in California and more than half less for a home of comparable size in footage.

When she found out I was thinking about possibly relocating she suggested Atlanta. She rode Mel and me around her predominantly Black (African American) neighborhood and the surrounding area and talked about the expanding job opportunities in the Atlanta area and the growth of the city and the suburbs in population. She spoke of the southern culture becoming more progressive and inclusive, specifically in the Atlanta area, with the influx of people from different parts of the country and the significant rise in the numbers of the college students. She talked of the historically black colleges such as Clark, Morehouse, where Martin Luther

King Jr. attended and her alma mater, Spellman. She even brought up the weather, the mild winters and how pretty and colorful and green Georgia was with all the different flowers and dogwood and maple and pine trees, in comparison to the dryness and dull, sandy colors of California. I was impressed.

My brother had been to Atlanta, mentioned it positively when I talked about moving again from Detroit and going back to California. He liked Atlanta better as a destination. I had looked at other places in 1975 and 1976 that were popular at that time. Texas oil was booming in the 70s and young people were flocking there, Houston was the place being talked about and written about.

For me, Chicago and Cleveland were out. I had been to both cities. One was a bigger and the other a smaller Detroit, respectively, and the weather was basically the same. New York City was, I imagined, too large and too harsh. I had met people from there and they seemed too aggressive. Now, just as my horizon had been altered, expanded on my first trip to California I could see, in reality, Atlanta, Georgia and I began to consider the possibilities.

Bea had treated Mel and me to her southern hospitality and charm. She cooked breakfast with grits and biscuits made from scratch and country ham with gravy. One evening she fried catfish and potatoes for dinner. We drank good liquor, Mel more than me and the lady of the house held her own and carried her liquor well. We talked about a lot of things and laughed often, she and I did. I could tell she believed she liked me and I believed she believed she liked me and I believed I could, would like her.

Two nights before I was scheduled to leave, the three of us went out to a club and had a good time. We drank and laughed and Bea and I had danced, slow and close. Back at the house we ate some leftover fried chicken to get the liquor off of us. Then, in the middle of the night, when all was dark and quiet, Beatrice came to my room. The next night I was in her room, in her bed and as I held her in my arms we talked softly of the future.

When I returned to California my co-workers said my wife had been calling for me. I showered and slept on a small cot in a guest room at

the rear of an unused office building at the cemetery for a week and continued to dodge my wife. I finally contacted her and explained I had no intention of coming back. I spoke to Brittany several times, picked her up from school and dropped her off at home a few times and tried, as best I could, to explain what was going on with her mother and me.

I rented a room from my co-worker Robert and his wife for another two weeks and sold as much of Frank's weed as I could. I then stayed at Shay's so Bea could fly out and stay with me for three days. After she returned to Georgia I gave my notice at work that I would be leaving. I had given Bea money to find me a place to live and to buy some basic kitchen and bathroom necessities and she said she would buy me (us) a king sized bed and some sheets, blankets, pillows and pillow cases.

A week after Bea left, on my way to work, I was drunk and I passed out behind the wheel. I came to when I rear-ended a Pontiac Firebird that was stopped at a red light. The Firebird was fairly heavily damaged and the right front end of my car was torn up. The two men in the Firebird threatened, wanted badly, to beat me down there in the street but some men standing in front of the corner liquor store wouldn't let that happen.

I apologized profusely and kept telling them my insurance would pay for everything. We exchanged driver's license numbers and insurance information. The Firebird could be driven, so they left. A tow truck came for my car and I was given the address of a gas station where it would be taken. I called work and told them I had been in an accident and then called Annie to come and get me. I had her take me to where my car was and thanked her and told her she could go home. When she found out I wasn't coming with her she cursed me until she saw me taking the jack out of the trunk and then she drove off. I took the jack and pried the metal away from the tire and drove to Frank's apartment and parked it in his carport. I slept on the floor in the front room at Frank's. For the next week I took three buses to Glendale and then my time was up at the cemetery.

I sold Frank's weed until my car was fixed, which took almost three weeks. I went to Tara Hill and paid the rent for two months and said goodbye to Spyder and his wife. She asked me angrily if I was really leaving my wife and child and I told her yes, I was. I went and stood and

looked at the calm blue water in the pool for a while and then took my last stroll through the complex. Finally I went to the bank and put some money in Annie's account. As I was packing my car that evening Frank got a delivery of twenty pounds of marijuana. He tried to talk me into staying with him, his girlfriend, her two children and his two large, black Bouviers and help him sell the weed. I politely declined and explained it was time for me to go. My time in California was up. I had a new plan. The next morning, as the sun was coming up, I started for Interstate 20, east.

The first part of the plan entailed me driving the almost 2,380 miles straight through. Fourteen hours out I started taking whites (bennies; Benzedrine) and I hated whites. I had already started drinking coffee and I wasn't a coffee drinker. In Mississippi I began seeing shadows of people running across the highway and I knew I was hallucinating. I stopped at a small convenience store in the late morning for aspirin for my throbbing headache and as I was going in a young boy (Black; African American) skipped out laughing. Then I saw the man (White) behind the counter show a large silver pistol and he told a young boy (Black; African American) standing at the counter that if his friend tried to cheat him again he would shoot him. That was my welcome to the Deep South.

Bea had found me a place in College Park, a suburb of Atlanta, a little over ten miles from downtown. It was an area filled with apartment complexes where people my age, some younger, some older, Black and White, mostly Black, male and female moved to when they left home and where young people coming to Atlanta for the first time, initially moved. The place was a two level townhouse with one and a half baths. The name of the complex was the Diplomat, on Camp Creek Parkway. It cost 185 dollars a month. Bea knew the people who managed the place so it was in my name and I put the utilities and phone in my name also. In late July of 1978 I was living in Georgia.

A week after I got there I started looking for a job. In late August I saw several ads in the classified data processing employment section of the newspaper, one for a computer operator, with IBM experience. I had only worked with large and mid-range Burroughs computers but six months before I left Forest Lawn they had purchased three smaller IBM System

370's and one mid-range IBM System 34. They planned on using them for simpler tasks such as creating financial reports and handling payroll. These computers had only been run in test mode but I did have the opportunity to see how they functioned, how they differed from Burroughs and I also had access to manuals that introduced me to the commands that were used to operate them and out of curiosity I had read several of them.

I applied for the position and an interview was scheduled. I told the interviewer (White, male) that I had over three years experience with Burroughs, starting with Detroit Bank and Trust and then Forest Lawn, and over a year of experience with IBM at my most recent employment. He asked me about the positions I had, what my responsibilities had been and a few technical questions about the IBM computers I had listed on my résumé and application. It was a casual conversation and then he asked about me, where I was from originally, why I had left DB&T and why did I leave Forest Lawn after such a brief time.

I explained I was originally from Detroit, was recently married, was now a first time father to a ten-year-old and my wife and I wanted to bring up our daughter somewhere other than Detroit, preferably somewhere safer and warmer so we moved to California. Then after living there we realized quickly we wanted to be closer to family but didn't want to again go through the harsh winters of the Midwest or the East and I had friends in Atlanta who suggested we relocate there, to the Southern region. I wanted to find a job in my field so I could move my family, who I dearly missed, to Georgia so we could be together. He liked my story, and me, so a week later I was offered the position of computer operator at a more than modest raise in salary.

I was now an employee at Coca-Cola Company. Atlanta, Georgia was where it all began for Coke. Here was the original home to what was then one of the largest companies in the world. In addition, I liked to drink Coca-Cola, then of course there was the rum and coke stage I went through. The main headquarters was on North Avenue near downtown. I would be working where they housed all of the IBM Mainframes, in this case four 3033 models, and peripheral equipment including tapes and tape drives. In this fortress-like building was done, at that time, the bulk of the

data processing for all of Coca-Cola businesses. The large brick building was in Hapeville, Georgia on North Central Avenue. I worked the afternoon shift, eight hours, five days a week and each day going and coming I would pass by the very first, original Dwarf House where Chick-fil-A began.

Bea and I were considered a couple but she worked days and into the evening, long hours and I worked until 11 p.m. so we got together sometimes after I got off but mostly on weekends. I met her family and went to some family gatherings and she showed me around the Atlanta area when possible and also had her younger brother take me around. He and I went to a few clubs and bars and I quickly found out he could get me small, personal amounts of weed and cocaine.

My first holiday season in Georgia approached and I was prepared to spend it with Bea and her family and friends. A week before Thanksgiving my manager's boss (White, male), the director of the data center called me to his office. He asked me how I was doing in my new environment and inquired about my wife and daughter and my plans for the holidays. I told him the transition had been somewhat difficult but I felt I was adjusting well and then I explained that my wife had changed her mind about moving to Georgia and that unfortunately we had officially separated and were in the process of getting a divorce. He expressed he was sorry to hear that and then invited me to spend Thanksgiving with him and his family. I thanked him and said I had plans, that I would be spending that time with friends. I always remembered that as an extremely kind gesture.

In January of 1979 I turned thirty years old. It was a relatively uneventful first eight months of that year. It was as if I was still recovering more and more each day from the short, in actual time, duration of my marriage and stay in California. But the emotional and psychological effects seemed to linger due to the sharp intensity and uniqueness of the situation I had gone through. Everything was still close and it all seemed longer than it actually had been, in that for me it was such a different situation.

By September I had settled in. I had met more people, was accepting the challenges of new my job and found the Atlanta area even more than I

hoped it would be. I was finding my way around the city and expanding my range to the outlying areas. I bought some furniture and began to discover the clothing stores I needed in order to replenish my wardrobe and of course buy some shoes. Bea was able to hang in as I transitioned to the person I really was and to who she had not seen and did not know. We brought the new year of 1980 in together and she was with me in January when I turned 31 years old.

The late 1970s and early 1980s was an exciting, halcyon-like time for young adults, especially a Black (African American) male (man) to be in Atlanta, Georgia. There were seemingly bars and nightclubs and venues for live music all over. On Campbellton Road there were the clubs, Cisco's, Marko's and as advertised, the world famous Mr. V's Figure 8. Partying people who came from all over had to go to Mr. V's. It was like when one went to California and had to go to Disneyland or Florida and couldn't pass up Disneyworld.

Throughout the latter part of 1979 I developed a close friendship with Willie, (Black; African American) a co-worker a few years younger than me. He was a nice guy, a good ol' country boy from Albany and by the spring of 1980 he and I were hanging and partying together, taking full advantage of the golden time and fantastic places. Many of the clubs and bars served alcohol until 4 a.m. and quite often Willie and I were heading in as the sun was coming up. Cisco's had a free buffet twice a week in the early evening, happy hour time and he and I would grab a bite to eat after work or on days off and then start the night from there.

Cisco's also had a Wednesday night Drink and Drown where all drinks were free between eight and twelve midnight, just make sure to tip the servers and cocktail waitresses well. Each opportunity I had, I drank and drowned. I never knew anyone who could hold their liquor like Willie. He drank but he never drowned.

He and I had plenty of time to get into devilment and sufficient time to get out. Coca-Cola's computer department had switched to a three day, twelve hour workweek and at that time processed data six days a week. Sundays were for maintenance and upgrades of hardware and software. We worked either Mondays through Wednesdays or Thursdays through

Saturdays. Day shift was 6 a.m. until 6:30 p.m. and night shift was 6 p.m. until 6:30 a.m. We rotated days to nights, nights to days and front of the week to end of the week and end of the week to front of the week. Every three months the front of the week would work six straight days, which meant the end of the week got over a week off. The rotation gave us basically, four weeks off plus we got a least two weeks vacation. It was estimated the eligible single women around our age outnumbered the eligible single men from anywhere between, at the least five to one, to as high as seven to one. Willie and I agreed there were obviously some men who were not taking advantage of that situation.

In the summer I was promoted, with a raise, to lead operator and was transferred downtown to the main building, the headquarters of Coca-Cola. Now I worked in a building full of women and across the street from Georgia Tech University. I was near downtown and in close proximity to all that area had to offer, including restaurants and bars. By then I was going to Atlanta Hawks basketball games, Atlanta Braves baseball games and hanging out at the Omni. I also had three connections for cocaine.

In September my friend Spyder mentioned to me during a phone conversation that a lady friend of his was living in the Atlanta area. I had met her a couple of times over the years so he gave me her number. She and I arranged to get together for lunch and I met her boyfriend Boyd, who was called Bop. I found out while eating my sandwich that Bop had access to marijuana, large amounts of marijuana. I got in touch with Gerry in Detroit and he and a mid-level marijuana dealer called JD started driving down once or twice a month to purchase fifteen or twenty pounds of weed that I got through Bop.

Everything increased through the remainder of the year. My business grew as I sold more and more drugs, both weed and cocaine. I spent more money on everything including clothes and shoes and I snorted and drank more. I didn't take pills or LSD only because I couldn't find any but that was only because I didn't try real hard. I had a party at a hotel suite to bring in 1981 and my personal party continued through my birthday on the 2nd of January when I turned 32 years old.

In early spring of that year I was riding in Decatur, a suburb of Atlanta,

when a blue and white Thunderbird with Michigan plates passed me. The driver honked and threw up his hand and I honked and returned the gesture. We had seen one another on occasions the past year or so and acknowledged each other because we both had Michigan plates. The Thunderbird slowed quickly and as I went by, the passenger was waving and motioning for me to pull over. I recognized the passenger as Harold, a former co-worker at Henry Ford Hospital who I hadn't seen in years. I pulled over and we all got out to talk and Harold introduced me to his friend he was visiting, Marvin, who was called Marv. I followed Marv to his apartment complex off of Old National Highway, which wasn't far from where I lived. I met Berniece, Marv's wife, who was called Niecey, and his three young children, two boys and a girl.

Over the next few months Marv and I became close and on the 4th of July holiday he had a barbeque and I met his friend Tom who lived in his complex. Tom owned an auto shop and was also a mid-level drug dealer and I also met Bear, who supplied Tom with cocaine and marijuana. By September I was getting weed from Bop and selling it to Bear and Tom at a better price than they had been getting.

Through one of Willie's girlfriend's sister I met Gator (White, male) who also had access to large amounts of marijuana. By late fall my network of friends (associates; cohorts; acquaintances) had expanded and the business of selling drugs and the activities of drinking and using drugs and all the people, places and things that went along with that life was dominating my existence. By that time Bea and I were just about done. I couldn't give of me what she wanted (needed).

In the fall and winter of 1981 I thought I could see significant changes in the business of selling cocaine and by the spring of 1982 what I thought I saw was confirmed. By that time just about all of the customers and quite a few of the sellers were smoking cocaine. The process that I had heard of a few years earlier as freebasing had expanded and altered. I had heard of well-known athletes doing it and Richard Pryor had almost burned himself to death while doing it and now smoking it was growing but it wasn't in freebase form.

Creating freebase cocaine was a process that removed the cocaine from

its natural form by mixing it with ammonia then treating that mixture with a solvent, usually ether. When the solvent evaporates from that dissolved form of cocaine all adulterants and additives were removed and only pure cocaine remained. What was being smoked, usually using a glass pipe, was vapors.

Now, in 1982 what was being smoked was an altered version of that process. What were called 'rocks' were being created. Eventually it would be called crack. The powdered cocaine, including the adulterants and additives, was being treated with baking soda, mixed and cooked in water and turned into a waxy-like substance that when it dried out became hard, crystal like, and burned at a certain temperature and therefore could also be smoked, usually, but not always, using a glass pipe. Different from freebasing, instead of smoking cocaine vapors a person was smoking a hardened form of cocaine.

Customers began asking me about how it came back and what was the return on the powder and how was the hit? Some were complaining that the powder I sold them didn't come back right or it didn't hit right. I had to learn how to cook my product and of course I had to take a hit, to test it. In the early months of 1982 I crossed another line. That was when I first started smoking cocaine (crack).

The business of selling drugs grew increasingly unstable. Many of the dealers, not just those who sold cocaine, even the weed sellers, also used cocaine so as the use of crack rose so did the harshness, intensity and treachery of that use spread. The time I could leave a half ounce or quarter ounce with someone to sell was a disappearing time. The time was passing when the smaller dealers I worked with could put some cut on the powder and bag it up and even with what they snorted they, and I, could still make a profit.

I had always tried to stay away from those who injected drugs and now smoking it was becoming worse than shooting it. People were going broke and essentially getting hooked. Through one of my dealers, I was selling indirectly to an Atlanta Falcons football player who was playing poorly. A woman getting dope from me was selling to two of the Atlanta Hawks basketball players and she started coming up short when one of the players

started writing her bad checks.

At first I couldn't (didn't) recognize that in fact, no one could handle smoking. I had always been around those who snorted. I myself had been introduced to powder and had come up snorting. A snorter could still take care of their business. It was a social drug, people went to parties and bars and nightclubs under the influence. The smokers were locked down, chained to the pipes and smoking utensils and somewhere near some heat and water, baking soda, and 151 Rum or isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol so they could cook and smoke. There was no laughing and talking and going out with that powerfully intense high. There was only what became the compulsive, repetitious hit and the ensuing addictive, repetitious rush that came with it.

In the summer of 1982 I decided to get rid of my car. The woman I was going with had two relatively new cars, a Buick and a Ford. I used one of her cars, rode with Willie and could get a ride from a drug user or dope seller if I needed to. And I could take the bus to and from work. The Camaro was giving me problems, had stopped on me twice and the repair work from the accident in California was poorly done. The fender was out of alignment and the paint was peeling. I had the car stripped and what remained was being left in a field as I was reporting it stolen so I could collect the insurance money.

Around that same time, Tom hooked up with some young men who I met (White, Black) who called themselves chemists. They were using chemicals to make this product in their bathtub. They called it sherm (PCP; water; angel dust). What they made was a somewhat damp clay-like substance and even when it dried out it wouldn't (didn't) turn into powder. Tom gave me some and I tried it and didn't like the high, it was much too strange. I gave some away to a few people to see if there was a market for it and Walter, everyone called him Walt, who I knew, because he lived in my complex, liked the stuff and said he knew people where he was from, Cincinnati, The Queen City, who would pay good money for it.

He made his calls and we flew four ounces there but we knew we couldn't do that again because the stuff had such a strong chemical odor we believed people were looking at us because they could smell us. His

people tried to snort some of it and said they didn't (couldn't) get high. I looked at the stuff, the color, the way it appeared and told them it was something new called peanut butter and that they had to eat it, just a little, or drop some in some liquor and drink it. We left some with them and an hour later they contacted Walt and said they wanted to buy it all.

The next time we went back, three weeks later to deliver two ounces I drove my woman's car. While we were there at a bar Walt introduced me to the Jordan brothers. I would find out they had three dope houses but they only sold cocaine. They didn't want the stuff I had but they could sell powder for me and we would split the profit. The next day Walt and I went to one of the houses and I talked business with the brothers as their customers came and went. Some of their customers would come and buy and leave, some stayed and cooked their dope and smoked it there. One of the customers was a huge man who came and sat and smoked and the oldest brother told me he played for the Cincinnati Bengals' football team. He was still there smoking when Walt and I left.

A week later I got two ounces of cocaine from a lady I was dealing with who was getting it from her aunt and I flew it to Cincinnati. When the brothers sold it all in two days, in small pieces, I had my connection fly in two more ounces. She and I stayed at one of the drug houses, which was really a three-bedroom apartment. The next night the felonious, notorious, treacherous Jordan brothers, who I later learned had both just recently gotten out of prison, pulled pistols on us and robbed us of the dope and all the money except for what they tossed on the bed for our plane fare home. They walked us to the corner with the pistols at their sides and told us to get out of Cincinnati and not to come back. We caught a cab to the airport and flew home. It was a major setback for me and it took me a while to recover. I had to pay back the money I owed for the dope in order to uphold my reputation and avoid conflict.

By the fall of 1982 I was smoking cocaine and drinking heavily on a regular basis. I got so drunk at a Gap Band concert that I woke up (came to) in the middle of the night face down on my bed and the last thing I remembered was someone handing me a half empty fifth of Cuervo Gold over my shoulder as a giant rooster on stage was crowing to announce it

was *Early In the Morning*.

Even though I still worked only three days a week and got all that other time off I was missing days and on too many occasions arriving late. Before the end of the year Bop had disappeared and I heard he had moved to Texas. Bear had been sent to prison on drug related charges and Tom was smoking so much he could barely take care of anything, including his auto shop. Gerry's drug selling connection, JD had his face slashed open and his throat slit on Christmas Day by his wife and almost died and was just trying to stay alive.

I brought in the new year of 1983 doing what I did best, I got high. Then I celebrated my 34th birthday doing what I did best, I got high. I drank champagne and gin and vodka and smoked weed and snorted and smoked cocaine and then I attempted to recover so I could deal with all that awaited me.

In February I got word that moves were being made at Coca-Cola to fire me. A man (White, male) I knew from another department had been promoted and became my manager. He wanted to terminate me but it wasn't a simple thing to do. There was a process. I had been written up twice, for missing days and being late but I had never been given a formal warning or put on probation. In addition, in the not to distant past I had received positive reviews and I had friends and connections who would support me. Also, I was a lead operator and had been employed for over four years and had been through several software and hardware upgrades. They needed time to train someone to do what I could do and only the other leads knew what I knew. He was biding his time because he had to justify the move he wanted to make and he couldn't do that with only a month or two of accessing my performance and making such a serious decision. But I knew, and he knew.

In April I gave him my two weeks notice. My manager was so relieved he told me I didn't have to work another two weeks. He arranged for me to receive a month's salary, the pay for the vacation time I had coming and my employment at Coca-Cola ended. I sold my stock, which amounted to a little over two thousand dollars and began to make plans. I would find another job and I wanted to move into a nicer apartment in a better area or

perhaps rent a house. I started selling and giving away furniture. I got rid of everything. I packed all my clothes. I never signed another lease after the first two years so I just left. I went to stay with my woman as I pulled together the next part of the plan. I bought three ounces of cocaine and put an ounce of cut on it and then I flew to Detroit. I would sell the dope and then come back to Atlanta and start over again, doing the things I did. I wouldn't (shouldn't) be gone too long.

I had talked to Frank, who I had sold weed with and stayed with in California who was now living in Detroit with a new girlfriend and they had a dope house together. I would find Big John, who had once sold a lot of dope, who I had met in 1976 and who I had heard was running his own dope house again on the west side of the city. And I would hook up with Gerry who had told me JD, who was scarred but had healed up, was again selling weed but wanted to expand into cocaine.

Frank picked me up from the airport and took me to his spot. He brought out an elaborate glass pipe so he (we) could cook some to see how it hit. His new girlfriend came up from the basement with wide, wild eyes and a twisting glass pipe that was a foot tall. I couldn't leave much with him and I wasn't about to sit in a dope house and monitor him and his girlfriend in order to keep them focused on business so I got a motel room.

Over the next month I stayed in hotels, and motels and with friends and acquaintances and cohorts and associates. Just about everyone was smoking dope (cocaine). I was paying people to drive me around and trying to keep a low profile. My family didn't even know I was in Detroit. If, when, I talked to them I made sure they thought I was in Atlanta.

Big John bought dope from me and sold dope but barely got into profit because he smoked the profit up and I was spending too much time there. Gerry and JD didn't use cocaine but they didn't know what they were doing so the people they were dealing with, the smokers, kept them from making any profit so they left the cocaine alone. It hadn't taken me long to realize I couldn't deal with Frank because he couldn't deal with his girlfriend. I sold dope and I smoked dope and as the end of August approach I was almost broke and once again stuck in Detroit. I finally took my suitcases and went back to the family home and crashed in my mom's

basement, back in the coal bin room. Now I had to come up with a new plan, again. Not only that, I had to remember what the previous plan had been and how and where it had (all) gone wrong.

Right before school was scheduled to start back in September I took a walk to my high school. I strolled around at the building where I had spent so much time. I sat on the bleachers at the football field and reflected on my life and thought about what to do next. As I started back home I was passing along the front of the building when at one of the entrances the large door was flung open and I saw a man come through the doorway and start waving. As he got closer he called out my name and I recognized Bernard, a friend I had met in California in 1972 when I lived in 'The Jungle.' He was originally from Detroit and we had hit it off, had some good times and sold a little weed together. The last time I had seen him was in 1977 when my now ex-wife and her daughter and I had moved to California and we were living in Tara Hill. At that time he and his wife had separated and he was talking about taking his two young boys, one was four and one was five, back to Detroit so he could be around family. Now he was working as a janitor at my old school and living directly across the street.

Over the next two weeks I visited Bernard on several occasions and we talked about old times and what we had been doing and been through the last six years. After I explained my current situation he suggested I move in with him. He said I could help him look after his boys, who were now ten and eleven years old, and figure out what I was going to do next. The following week I told my mom and those who needed to know, that I was going to stay with a friend for a while. I took a cab, with my three suitcases, and went to stay with Bernard, his oldest son, Bernard Jr., who was called Junior and his youngest, William who everyone called Billy.

We stayed upstairs in a two family home and as the beginning of October came, in the daytime, I would sit and look out of the front window at the young students going in and out of the very same doors I had walked through, in one direction or the other, countless times. At night I would lie on the two comforters on the living room floor and pull the blankets up to my chin and stare at the ceiling and think and plan.

Soon after I moved in, Bernard told me he bought his weed, his personal that he smoked, from the man (Black; African American) who lived next door. He had known this man casually for almost three years. I told Bernard to find out if he had access to larger quantities. Bernard came back and told me the man next door could get pounds and would front Bernard if he thought he could get rid of some. My friend said he didn't know anyone he could sell pounds to and I told him I thought I did. We discussed what we could do. We wouldn't be doing anything small, with the boys there, plus we were right around the corner from a police station.

Within two weeks I was able to transact two deals, flipping ten pounds each time. We didn't make much profit but it gave me incentive and some hope of a way out. Bernard didn't have a car so we would walk to the grocery store for food, the nearby convenience store for snacks and I would walk to Michigan Avenue or Warren Avenue to buy my beer and liquor. As the weather began growing colder I sold some single pounds and right before Thanksgiving I started taking a cab to Livernois Avenue to a bar a friend of mine (Black; African American) named Benjamin, everyone called him Benny, from high school owned. The bar was called the Fox's Den. I didn't like going there for two main reasons. First, it was kind of dangerous. In fact back in 1975 when I was still trying to decide which direction to go, before I got a job, I had been in that bar when a man got shot through the neck a few feet from me. I was beaned down, high off of uppers, and I didn't react the way I should have, with emotion (fear) and two days later I broke out in a rash on my face and neck and chest. I went to Henry Ford Hospital and the doctor said I was allergic to something and did I have any idea what that was? I told him I had no idea but I started to tell him I was allergic to someone getting shot near me and seeing a body stretched out and blood running on the floor.

The second reason I didn't like the place was that on several nights a week Benny had women dancing and taking their clothes off so at that time it was basically a strip club and I wasn't about that. Adding to that was the fact he didn't even have a license for those activities so it was also an illegal house of ill repute. He wouldn't tell me if he was paying off the police. Still I went a couple times a week and on the weekends when the

dancers weren't there. I ran into other people I knew from high school and from my neighborhood who also knew Benny. With Benny's approval I sold a few small bags of weed. I was able to make enough money so that Bernard and I were able to take the bus downtown with the boys and buy them some winter clothes and it looked like we would be able to get them some of the things they wanted for Christmas. I was able to buy my vodka or gin or whatever and smoke my weed and stare out of the front window and Bernard could smoke his weed and sit and watch his fish swim around in his fish tank.

In early December the dope man next door branched out and started getting powdered cocaine along with his shipments of marijuana. Around this same time Bernard made another cocaine connection. It was with a co-worker, a janitor he worked with who had recently been paroled from prison. He wanted Bernard to help him sell some cocaine so he could get back on his feet. By then I was dealing directly with the man next door and I got an ounce fronted to me. I started selling Big John eight balls, which is an eighth of an ounce. I wouldn't leave anything with him and it didn't matter if he made a profit or not because he was going to buy just so he could smoke. Sometimes I smoked a little at his dope house but I didn't like staying in that place too long. I didn't smoke cocaine at Bernard's, I didn't want to be high like that around the boys but I snorted sometimes. I sold some of the janitor's dope to help him out when his price was right. As business picked up I started figuring out what I could put away and how much I wanted to stash so I could leave and go back to Atlanta, and I would need transportation.

I visited my mom on Christmas to give her a gift and enjoy her cooking along with my brother and his girlfriend and my sister and her husband. I walked back in the cold and through the snow so I could look at the Christmas lights that people still put up outside their homes. At Bernard's I watched the boys as they played with their Christmas gifts and tried on some of their new clothes.

As the new year came in I stood in the backyard and listened to the celebratory gunfire and smoked weed and drank alcohol and of course I drank alcohol and smoked weed and snorted cocaine for my birthday in

January of 1984. I was 35 years old.

Soon after the new year I was in the Fox's Den and I ran into a man named Damon who I knew from the neighborhood. He was around my age and he and I had hung out a few times in the mid '70s. He owned two cleaners and considered himself more of a businessman than a gamer. He was with his cousin who was a few years younger than him and who I didn't know but he knew of me. His name was Prentiss. His close friends and associates called him Skoot, to me he was Prentiss. He wanted to be a hustler and was on front street as a gamer. He dressed decently and drove a brown 1978 Cadillac Coupe DeVille.

I sold Damon a bag of weed and a small package of cocaine and he and Prentiss went outside to the car to sample the dope and smoke some weed. When they came back in we began to talk and Prentiss said he knew some people who wanted to get a pound of weed if I could get it. Two days later we took care of that deal smoothly and then over the next few days after that I sold four separate pounds through Prentiss. I would get the weed from the dope man next door and ride with him for the deliveries.

Right around mid-January Benny's younger brother, Timothy, was in the bar. He had been home from college for the holidays and was now back on business. Benny and I were close to the same age and had graduated in the same class. Timothy, who everyone called Timmy, was much younger than us, maybe ten years younger. I hadn't seen him in perhaps fifteen years, when I was visiting Benny at his family home. I used to grab Timmy and thump his head. I reminded him of that as we laughed and talked. Now he was six feet five inches tall and I told him I couldn't thump his head or call him Timmy any longer, so we settled on Tim.

When I commented on his size he told me he weighed close to 260 pounds, had played football in college in El Paso, Texas and was now playing semi-pro ball in that area. In the course of our conversation he also told me about the business he was back in town for. He said he would be having large amounts of marijuana delivered from Texas, he was on his way back there to set it up. He heard I was connected and asked me If I could help him get rid of some of it. I made sure he had my number and

told him to call me when he was back in town.

A week later Tim called me and said he was straight. He brought ten pounds to Bernard's house. I looked at it, smelled it and then took a few puffs from a joint. It was kind of a light-green color with long buds. I told him I would try to help him out but I didn't think I could do much with it. First, it was too expensive, five hundred dollars a pound to me and with my price added on it would be too hard to move, besides, I could get pounds for less. Plus, I told him, I didn't think it was very good. I decided to do what I could. It took Prentiss and me two weeks to sell the ten pounds and I made very little profit.

Near the end of January Tim was back in town. He wanted to bring me ten pounds but I told him to hold up. I wanted to back off so I told him I would get it, as I needed it. I made some calls and one of the calls I made was to Prentiss. Three days later he called me back and said Twin, a friend (cohort; associate) of his wanted to buy five pounds. We had sold him one pound a while ago.

I had Tim bring me five pounds and I put it in a medium-sized suitcase that Bernard had and that night Prentiss and I rode to Twin's house. We walked in the dark along the side of the house toward the back with Prentiss in front of me. As we neared the rear a man, dressed in black, came running from around the house yelling and cursing and pushed Prentiss and he sat down. The man had what looked like a sword or a machete. He raised it and was hollering at me to get down, get down, and to drop the bag. He was on me with the weapon raised and I went down as he stepped past Prentiss who was sitting with his back against the house. He told me not to move as he tried to go through my pockets but I kept sliding and twisting and he gave up. Then he wanted to know what's in the bag and he grabbed the suitcase and ran back through the backyard and into the alley and was gone. I knew Skoot (Prentiss) had set me up.

I had Prentiss take me to Bernard's. He and the boys were at the movies. I called Tim and told him what had happened, where to meet me the next day and what time. Prentiss kept trying to leave but I tried to have him wait there with me. I was trying to figure out what to do next. I knew he had to meet whoever was in on it with him. He was saying Twin set us

up, that he was going over there to find out what was going on. I had no crew, no backup. I had been out there on front street on my own. He left.

I had an eighth of an ounce of cocaine from the ex-con and what I had left from a quarter of an ounce of powder and almost a pound of weed from the dope man next door. I took a cab to Big John's. I was going to stay there while the powder was being sold and then have Big John order me a pistol.

I got in touch with Spyder's younger brother Cornell, everyone called him Hollywood or Wood and told him to come to Big John's. He had been buying small packages of cocaine and pestering me to let him sell some dope for me and when he found out I was dealing with Prentiss he had told me Prentiss was a dirty dude and that they had run together for years and that they had had a serious falling out. Now I had something for Wood to do. When he got there we went in the basement and I told him what had happened. I gave him a small bag of dope and some weed and told him to find out what he could, and that I would pay him. I stayed at the dope house until daylight, until a fully loaded .32 semi-automatic pistol was delivered.

Later that evening I met with Tim and went over everything. I told him I believed Prentiss had set me up and that I knew I was responsible for the product and that I would do what I had to do to make it right. That night I was finally able to get in touch with Darlene's younger brother Mike. We had been close for years, since his sister and I first got together and had hung out a few times over the past months. He was a graduate of Eastern Michigan University, an ex-football player for the school, had once taught in high school and was an on again off again heroin addict. He was also a good person.

Now I needed help from someone who had heart and that I could trust. I also needed transportation. He picked me up from Bernard's and I told him what had happened. I paid him to take me to two of the houses where Prentiss and I had sold weed. I wanted to find out if they needed any, if they had bought any from Prentiss.

Over the next three days I talked to Prentiss every day. I explained we were responsible for the stolen weed and what Tim was saying, who I also

talked to every day. I told Prentiss the people in Texas were upset, but I never let him know I believed he was behind it all.

Over the course of this time the ex-con and the dope man next door were pressing me about their money. I told them I was on it but things were slow. I had decided to keep everything that I had and that I could pull together for what I needed to do, whatever that was. Also during this time Wood had told me he talked with Twin and he and his brother, his twin, had heard about what happened but swore they had nothing to do with it and were upset that Prentiss had brought them into it. They also said they had heard that Prentiss had beat Freddie G out of some weed and that before they found out what had gone down Prentiss was supposed to sell them a pound but never came through with it and that they didn't want to be involved with him and had cancelled that order.

Five days from the robbery Wood and I met at Big John's. He told me Prentiss had sold his brother's wife, his drug selling sister-in-law, two pounds of weed and traded a half-pound for some cocaine. The next day I had Mike take Wood and me to Stephanie's, the sister-in-law's house and I gave Wood enough money to buy a small bag of weed. What he handed me was a clear plastic baggie with several long buds of light-green colored marijuana.

Two days later Mike borrowed his father's van. I called Prentiss and told him I had some new weed for us to sell and I wanted him to try it. A block from his house I gave Mike the pistol and he got out. I drove on and pulled up and parked in front of Prentiss's house behind his Cadillac and honked the horn. He came out and stood outside the door at the window that was down and I showed him some weed and rolling papers and told him to get in and roll a joint. He got in and as he was closing the door Mike snatched it open, pointed the gun at Prentiss and ordered him to move to the back and lie down. As Prentiss slowly began to move he started to turn back and Mike pushed him and he stumbled and fell. I drove off.

I rode him around for a while. I wanted him to wonder what was next. When he tried to speak, to ask what was up, where we were going, Mike told him to shut up. After a while Mike told him to sit up with his back

against the side wall. I took him to a dead end street and parked. I told him I knew he had set me up. That I knew it was Freddie G who had come from behind the house and that he had sold Stephanie weed and traded weed to her for cocaine.

He denied it, said he had nothing to do with it, that it was Twin who had set us up. I tossed the baggie of weed at his feet and told him I had bought that from Stephanie. As he looked down at it I told him I wanted that Harley Davidson he had shown me and that he was going to sign over the title and I was going to give it to the man with the gun who was here, along with his crew, from Texas for their money. Prentiss protested, said he wasn't giving up his bike, that he could come up with some money. Mike rose to move to the back and Prentiss agreed to give up the bike.

It was growing dark when we got back to his house. I got out and went to the passenger side door. Mike got out and handed me the gun. I motioned for Prentiss to get out and put him in front of us and told him we'd first get the bike from the garage. We started forward and as we neared the side of the house Prentiss started running. I aimed the gun at his back, I hesitated, I didn't (couldn't) pull the trigger. Mike told him he better stop but he kept running. Then Mike cursed at him, told him we'd find him. The two of us headed quickly back to the street and before we got back in the van I went around and shot out the windows on the driver's side of his Cadillac.

I gave Mike some money and had him drop me off at a motel. I couldn't go to Bernard's so I had him meet me. We talked, I told him what had happened. He said the dope man had taken my suitcases with all my clothes as payment toward what I owed him. I told my friend not to worry about it, everything would be all right. I gave him some money and a hug and thanked him and told him to tell the boys goodbye that I would be in touch and that I was going back to Atlanta.

Two days later I contacted Tim and told him I was trying to pull some of his money together. He said he had heard what had happened and that Prentiss and another guy had been to the bar and were looking for me. I asked him who the other guy was and he wouldn't tell me, said he didn't want to be involved. I thought about how I was going through all this to

get him straight so I didn't appreciate that. I kept making new plans.

I went to my mom's. I had the cab drop me off two streets over and then I walked in the snow through the alley and went in the side door. I got some clothes and put them in a small suitcase. I gave her some money, told her I was going back to Atlanta, that I had a job waiting and I kissed her on the cheek goodbye and went back out of the side door and through the alley. I walked over two streets and then up to Warren Avenue where I caught a cab to the dope house.

I had planned to sell Big John the gun back but he said Wood was trying to get in touch with me. I called him and he said Prentiss's wife had contacted him and that Prentiss had some money for the Texas people, five hundred dollars. I told him how to make arrangements for the money to be delivered to him the next day. I smoked some dope, smoked some weed, drank some alcohol and took a cab back to the motel.

The next evening I watched from down the street, in a doorway on Grand River Avenue as Prentiss's wife drove up in her car and someone handed Wood an envelope. He walked through the department store and I followed at a distance. We came out on the other side of the store and went into a corner hamburger spot. He gave me the envelope and I counted the money and handed him fifty dollars. I thanked him for his help, wished him luck and told him I was headed back to Atlanta. We left and went our separate ways.

That night I went to Big John's and got high and as the sun came up I sold him the gun back, told him I was headed to Atlanta and took a cab back to the motel. The next night I had my brother pick me up and take me downtown to the bus station. He wanted to take me to the airport, to put me on a plane. He offered to pay for my ticket. I thanked him and turned down the offer. I told him I needed time to think, and plan. We hugged goodbye and he wished me luck.

I had, what I told myself, were my last drinks of alcohol at a nearby bar. Part of what I was thinking was that I had made up my mind. I would be a different person, a new man when I arrived at my destination. It was sometime in late February when I bought a Greyhound bus ticket to Las Vegas, Nevada.

The ride was a little over fifty hours. I was tired and slept off and on most of the first day. They were long restless naps with wild, disturbing dreams. The second day I barely slept. I just looked out of the window and thought about the things that weighed on my mind. I reflected on the people, places and events of my more recent past and wondered about the future.

When I arrived, I stuffed the long winter coat I had been wearing the past months and had used to cover myself as I tried to sleep in the bus seat, into a trashcan. I changed to tennis shoes and threw my boots away. I now wore jeans, a red and white wool shirt, a short black leather jacket and a black wool baseball cap. I knew the Las Vegas desert could get cold, particularly at night in the wintertime.

I took a bus down Las Vegas Boulevard, got off at Tropicana and walked over to Paradise Road I went to a Howard Johnson's Motel I knew about and had stayed at before. It was relatively inexpensive, had a kitchenette area with a stove and small refrigerator and a room could be rented by the week, or month.

My immediate plan, after I got settled in, was to find a job, preferably working with computers. I rented a room and then unpacked my suitcase. I walked to the nearby grocery store and bought some food and a few other necessities and then took a walk around the complex that would be my home for a while.

I spent the remainder of February and the first of March taking buses to the few job interviews I was able to schedule and filling out applications. I couldn't find any computer operator jobs so I took a bus to a library to use a typewriter to brush up on my typing. I put in applications for office work and even tried to get a job at a car wash. I had gone a little over a month but by mid-March was drinking heavily again.

I met a woman on the bus who ended up staying a few nights with me off and on. Then I met a woman with a car and we went out a few times but I really didn't have any clothes that allowed me to go to the places I wanted to go. We spent our time downtown with the locals, which was all right, but I wanted to be on the main strip.

Near the end of March I met a man (White) in the lobby of the motel

who was living there too. We talked about sports and gambling and some other things and got around to introducing ourselves. Jim was his name and during the conversation he told me he was working a telemarketing job and said he was making pretty good money and could get me a job there too.

A few days later Jim and I made arrangements to meet up at a nearby bar and we had a few drinks and shot some pool. He kept trying to sell me on getting a job where he worked and told me if I got hired in he could get a bonus. I kept telling him I was thinking about it and actually started giving it some serious thought. The next weekend we met at the bar and drank and shot pool and he played the slot machines. This time when we left he invited me to his room. He brought out a small glass pipe, cooked some cocaine and we smoked it.

The next weekend I was in the bar when Jim came in. I had been in there for a while shooting pool and drinking and was already heavily under the influence. The last thing I remember was him talking about buying some cocaine. The next afternoon I woke up (came to) on my bed and when I pulled myself together I called Jim's room to see what had happened. He wished me luck and then hung up on me. When I called back he didn't (wouldn't) answer the phone so I didn't call again. I didn't go back to the bar and I never saw him again.

On the afternoon of April 1, I was sitting at the bar at the Tropicana thinking and sipping on a Bloody Mary and snacking on peanuts when I overheard the bartender tell two young women (Black; African American) sitting a ways from me that Marvin Gaye had been shot and killed by his father. I knew instantly it was no April Fool's joke. It was too absurd and horrible. I ordered another drink and when the bartender brought the drink and more peanuts I asked him about what he had said. He confirmed it was true and then added that Marvin's time must have been up. That's what I had been sitting there thinking. I wouldn't be able to find a decent job and my time in Las Vegas was up.

I had a new plan. I was able to contact Spyder. I knew he and his wife were no longer together because he had visited me in Atlanta while he was briefly living in Detroit. I also knew he was back in California, in the Los

Angeles area. I got in touch with him and explained my situation (partly). I asked if I could stay with him a few days until I could find Tess and he told me to come on. He said he had an apartment with his girlfriend and their three-year-old daughter near Wilshire Boulevard.

My suitcase was heavy so I threw away the clothes I didn't think I would need in Southern California in April. I took a bus over to Los Angeles. I stayed with Spyder for almost a week as I got in touch with people I knew. By then Tess had been to Africa several times and was now back in Los Angeles. I was finally able to contact her. I explained my situation (partly) and told her I needed a place to stay for a short time. She told me she had an apartment on Crenshaw Boulevard and that I could stay with her for a while. I had a past female acquaintance pick me up and drop me off there.

Tess had a two-bedroom apartment with one bedroom empty. I would find out she was running her own marketing business and preparing to go to West Africa to teach at a university. She had decided to put her work on her PhD on hold. I slept on the floor for three days. I had no intentions of staying with her any longer than I had to. We were still friends and I wanted that relationship to stay that way. I contacted Billy, Darlene's friend and my Las Vegas buddy. He and I had been in touch because on several occasions I had mailed him small amounts of cocaine from Georgia to sell for me. He put me in touch with Darlene. I told her I needed to talk to her and she told me when to come to her place and what bus to take. I knew Darlene was now married. What I needed was somewhere to stay and I hoped, with her connections, she could help me.

When I got there I met her husband Delroy, who was called Del. She and I went and sat in the backyard and I explained my situation (partly) and that I needed a place to stay until I could find a job. She and I went back in the house and then she and Del went to the backyard. When they came back in Darlene said I could stay with them. There was a sofa bed in the spare bedroom I could sleep on. Once again she had changed the course of my life.

Darlene had graduated from Wayne State with her B.A. and still worked for the airline. She only worked part time. I would find out Del,

who was a couple years older than me, which made him quite a few years younger than Darlene, didn't work at all and was a recovering heroin addict. We were all struggling financially. For the next three weeks I would walk to Von's Grocery Store on Sundays and stand near the newspaper rack and ask people who bought the paper if I could have the classified section if they didn't need it. I could have stolen a paper but I didn't, not that I couldn't.

On the third week I found an ad for a job placement service for data processing, specifically programmers, analysts and several positions in the operations area. I made an appointment and took a bus to their office near downtown. I filled out an application, took a test and had an interview. A week later I was sent to Great Western Bank in Northridge. I had to take three buses to get there. I had an interview with the manager (Black; African American) of the operations department. As he was showing me the facilities and work area we were conversing and he had a copy of my application in his hand that he was referring to. We talked about the computers I had worked with and the places I had worked. He noted I had not worked in over a year and wanted to know why and what I had been doing.

I explained that I had left Coca-Cola due to a family illness. My sister's kidneys were failing and it was very possible I would have to give her one of mine. I decided not to work because I didn't know when or if I would have to go through the surgical procedure and recovery. He said he was sorry to hear about my sister and inquired as to how the situation turned out. I told him before I could give her a kidney that she had passed away (died) and I had just relocated.

Three days later I was offered a contract for computer operator for six months with the possibility of a permanent position. I requested the night shift from 12 at night until 8:30 in the morning. I would be working Wednesday through Sunday. Because of my over eight years experience and the cost of living in California, my manager arranged for me to make a modest amount more than I did at Coca-Cola.

I was able to help Darlene with the rent and buy food for us all. She told me not to be in a rush to find my own place. That I could save some

money staying there for a while. For two months I took three buses to and from Northridge but I didn't stop looking in the paper for jobs. I wanted something part time or a job on the afternoon shift. I had Mondays and Tuesdays off and also during the daytime to place applications and for interviews. During that time I was drinking my normal excessive amount and smoking weed on occasions.

In mid-August I got a full-time job at Automatic Data Processing working the afternoon shift Monday through Friday. Between the two jobs I was earning what would come to, a little over fifty thousand a year before taxes. I started taking whites (bennies; Benzedrine) on the three days I worked sixteen hours. Darlene either drove me from ADP to Great Western or let me use her car.

There was a woman named Patricia, everyone called her Pat, who worked the day shift at ADP. She was five years younger than me and we would talk and flirt between the time I came in and she left for the day. She transferred to my shift two months after I started and by then she believed she cared for me, I believed she believed she cared for me so we started getting together, with what little time I had.

She had her own apartment and I started spending time in her spare bedroom. I had to get my rest and she had to get her rest so sometimes I would go to her room for a while and sometimes she came to my room. She drove a new Volkswagen and she would help me get to my two jobs and sometimes I drove her car.

I used either Darlene's or Pat's car to go shopping for new clothes and shoes but I kept most of my things at Darlene's. I wanted to continue helping her out with the rent so I resisted the pressure from Pat to move in with her. Another reason I didn't move in was because she rarely drank alcohol and didn't use drugs of any kind. I was drinking, taking pills, smoking weed and occasionally snorting cocaine.

By the late fall of 1984 I was preparing to buy a car. Even though I had what I felt was enough for a down payment Pat insisted on putting a thousand dollars with it. We went together and I found the automobile I wanted. When the salesman checked my credit he said I didn't qualify so Pat suggested that she could co-sign and the sale went through.

I bought a 1983 Cadillac Eldorado. It had a metallic Briar Brown color on the hood and trunk over a metallic Briar Firemist color on the sides. It had matching brown Elk Grain vinyl half cabriolet roof with Sierra Grain leather interior and Tampico carpeting in a matching dark Briar Brown color.

A week later I was back at the Cadillac dealer for service that had been promised me and I met an older gentleman (White) who had a gold plated Rolls-Royce-like grill and gold in different areas of his new white Eldorado. We got to talking and he said he could get me a deal on the gold plating. A few days later I met him at the detail shop. The grill was a little too gaudy for my taste but I had the front Cadillac hood ornament plated in gold and Cadillac emblems around the two door locks and the trunk emblem done also. Now I had my Cadillac, an Eldorado, the car I had been wanting since I was barely a teenager in Detroit. My personalized license plate was Poetry 2.

I still spent my time between Pat's and Darlene's place. I kept looking for another job. Working two jobs, along with the traveling distance was wearing me out. In early December I found a job at National Medical Enterprises in Hawthorne, California. I could make close to forty thousand a year before taxes and I could work overtime. I quit Great Western and Automatic Data Processing. In the new year of 1985 I would be working a new job, driving my daydream car and I would turn 36 years old.

National Medical Enterprises was a healthcare company that owned and operated almost three hundred medical facilities, including acute care hospitals, nursing homes, psychiatric hospitals, rehabilitation hospitals and other health related enterprises in addition to substance abuse treatment centers in different parts of the country.

I was initially scheduled to work five days a week Sunday through Thursday from 11 p.m. until 7:30 a.m. The NME data center was a twenty-four hour, seven days a week operation so shifts and people were staggered to cover that time period. We were understaffed so I worked extra days and sometimes sixteen hours a day. I was shown how to temporarily raise my exemptions so I could take home more money. I found a one bedroom apartment in a new building ten minutes from where

I worked. I moved in as only the second tenant. I was paying 575 dollars a month rent and a little over 400 dollars a month car note plus car insurance, gas, and upkeep and purchasing normal necessities, such as food.

In March the NME operations area of the data center went to twelve hour days and three and four day work weeks similar to Coca-Cola and what many business that required constant staffing were changing to, either twelve or ten hour days. We now worked either three straight days or four straight days every other week. I was a lead operator and when we changed to the new schedule I was assigned to what I considered to be, the best shift. I worked Sunday through Tuesday in addition to a Wednesday every other week. The end of the week worked Thursday through Saturday and Wednesday every other week. I worked 6 p.m. at night until 6:30 a.m. in the morning. I got Pat a job at NME in the programming area but she worked days during the week so I rarely saw her. We didn't interact or talk much but we were still connected by the car.

I was adding clothes and shoes to my closets. I was buying suits from the garment district in downtown Los Angeles. I found nice, relatively inexpensive, lightweight wools and linens and silks and cotton dress shirts, along with casual clothes. I found shoe stores that sold lizard and alligator and ostrich. I bought some gold chains and bracelets and diamond rings. Then in early summer I cut back on my extra days and extra hours.

Throughout the summer I was going to clubs, bars, concerts, and the Hollywood Park racetrack to watch the horses run. I would drive over to Las Vegas at least twice a month. A couple of times, almost as a celebration to my change in status, I stayed at the Howard Johnson's on Paradise Road. Sometimes I would start early, when it was still dark and stay a few hours and then drive back. Watching the sun come up and driving through the desert was a beautiful ride.

I drank alcohol everywhere I went and occasionally dropped whites (bennies; Benzedrine) and I didn't even like them. I snorted cocaine in bathroom stalls and in my Cadillac as I traveled wherever I wanted to go. Sometimes a woman was with me, most times not. By late fall I was riding around with a cooler and ice in my trunk with a large bottle of my new

drink, white wine, or champagne that I sometimes mixed with orange juice or grapefruit juice. I also rode with a small leather valise in my trunk. It contained a small glass, heat-resistant vial, a bottle of water, a package of cotton, a container of baking soda, straight pieces of wire coat hanger, a bottle of 151 Rum and a glass pipe or glass straight shooter which was a thin glass tube with metal screens in the end.

I would put powdered cocaine, baking soda and water in the vial, wrap cotton on the end of the hanger and dip it in the rum and light it. I used the flame to bring the water to a boil and by tilting, twisting and twirling the vial I would create the oil-like, gummy substance that would cling to the other end of the hanger and I could remove the cocaine, let it dry out and smoke it. It was flash cooking, or joint cooking and only took a few minutes. It was the way I used to do it at Big John's dope house.

In late November the service man I dealt with all the time at the Cadillac dealer was writing up my order for an oil change and he told me one of the secretaries (Black; African American) in the office had asked about me several times and indicated to him that she really wanted to meet me. I had seen her, made note that each time I was there she found a reason to walk past or come into the waiting room for coffee where I sat.

When she came past that day I spoke and we talked for a little while. Before I left I motioned her from the office and asked if she would like to grab a bite to eat after she got off, maybe have a drink? She agreed and when she got off I picked her up and we went to a nearby bar where we ate a snack and had a drink.

Her name was Cheryl and by coincidence she was originally from Detroit. We had a nice conversation, exchanged numbers and within a few weeks we were hanging out on a fairly regular basis. Cheryl, I would find out, was four years younger than me. She drank alcohol moderately, mostly red wine, smoked weed regularly and initially, to my knowledge, didn't do drugs.

We grew closer over the Christmas holidays and brought the new year in and celebrated my birthday together in January of 1986. I was 37 years old. Soon after my birthday she changed jobs and began working for two doctors as their office manager. By the first week of February I had Cheryl

smoking cocaine with me. By then I was also selling small amounts of marijuana and powdered cocaine. My customers were several people I knew from my previous California stays and a few co-workers who were making purchases for themselves or someone they knew. I was too much involved in drinking and smoking weed and cocaine to try to be a real dope man.

I had refused to purchase furniture for my new apartment, except for a kitchen set with two chairs and a small table. I also had several folding chairs I would move from room to room, and that was all. I had been sleeping on the floor on blankets and comforters in the bedroom so any woman that spent the night slept like that too. I also had several suitcases, including a large, more than likely stolen, Louis Vuitton chest and duffle I bought from a friend of Darlene's for 400 dollars. Of course I had clothes and shoes.

In March I let Buck, a friend of Darlene's who needed a place to stay, move in with me. His girlfriend, Phyllis was eventually staying there too. They slept in the living room on the floor and on a cot that Buck had brought with him. Phyllis and Cheryl became smoking buddies and the four of us got high together.

In April I went to court to delay being evicted because I wouldn't (couldn't) pay the rent. By then Pat was calling me and leaving notes for me at work because the company that financed the car was calling her because I had quit paying the car note. In early June I washed the car, put a good wax job on it and parked it in Pat's space beneath her building. I put the keys under the mat and walked away from my Eldorado Cadillac.

Two weeks later I called my landlady (White) to lie to her, to tell her I still planned on catching up on my rent per court order and she was nice enough to let me know the sheriffs were, right at that time, on the way to my apartment. I quickly hid the triple-beam scale I used to weigh drugs in one of the boxes I had packed and as I put a larger box on top of it the sheriffs were pounding on the door. When I let them in they put Phyllis, who was crashed on the cot and me out, and put a lock on the door. Two days later I drove Cheryl's Gremlin to the apartment and the nice landlady let me get everything that was there and I loaded the car up

and went back to Cheryl's apartment.

I stayed at Cheryl's, along with Buck and Phyllis and took two buses to work. In early July I found out that Fish, the man I met through Rodney (Poindexter; Poinsy) and who I had been in touch with off and on, worked as an assistant finance manager at an Audi dealer on La Brea Avenue. I contacted him. We falsified the papers I filled out in terms of my length of time on the job and gross income and he put me in a low mileage 1986 tan Audi 4000 with tan interior and a retractable sunroof. I paid him 500 dollars he said he had to split with a lady at the finance company. The personalized plate was POET 4 U.

By the first of August I had sold or pawned all my jewelry, pawned my two pieces of Louis Vuitton luggage and was piecing up dollars with the other three and driving my Audi to buy rocks (crack) for 5 and 10 dollars from drug dealers on the streets and in dark alleys. I could see my Audi disappearing. That glass pipe was burning me up along with everything I once valued. For weeks the reality of my situation had been overwhelming me. The alcohol no longer brought me down or leveled me off. The rush of the cocaine I smoked was followed immediately by powerful paranoid thoughts and a tremendous sense of guilt. I wanted desperately to stop but I wanted Cheryl to stop also. I knew she had never smoked cocaine before meeting me.

Now, when I wasn't working, I spent hours lying on the living room floor staring at the ceiling as Cheryl and Phyllis and Buck smoked crack in the bedroom. I watched Buck walk past me time after time, day after day, night after night and into the street to buy rocks. I watched as Cheryl dragged herself to work, when she managed to go and I knew we were (both) together in this madness but also (both) alone.

On a Tuesday in late August I watched as Cheryl, having called in sick at work, stood in the middle of the living room with a lighter in one hand, a glass straight shooter in the other, took a hit of crack and held it in with closed eyes and then blew out smoke. Buck was crashed on the couch and Phyllis was sitting at the kitchen table cleaning a glass pipe and preparing to smoke cocaine.

By the next evening, on Wednesday day 27, I had come to the end of

the road upon which I traveled. I couldn't go back. The road behind me was cluttered with the wreckage of everything I had damaged and abandoned and filled with painful remnants of the relationships I had abused and destroyed. Before me was a dead end and even in the light there was nothing, only the darkness that stretched beyond the horizon. I was at a crossroads that ran off in two directions, and disappeared. I felt helpless but not hopeless.

I took Cheryl by the hand and led her into the bedroom. I explained to her that we both needed to go to rehab, that we were both addicts, crack heads. She said maybe I was an addict but she wasn't. She told me to go ahead, she wasn't going. I asked her to come go with me and she said no, she could quit anytime she wanted to. And when I asked her why she didn't quit she said because she didn't want to.

It took me a couple of hours to go through my possessions and put all my clothes and shoes and things into the trunk that I wanted to take. Everything else I threw away. I drove myself to Century City Hospital. And that was the twisting and long winding journey that took me to a rehab program called New Beginnings.

Crossing the Line

I've existed within periods of eight decades as of now and I've crossed many lines. Some of those lines were invisible to me and I didn't (couldn't) see them. Others lines were obvious, I saw them clearly and crossed them willingly. Of course, some lines were meant to be, supposed to be crossed. Lines are drawn for a reason.

Other lines I was pulled across, pushed across, enticed across, sometimes by someone I knew, sometimes by strangers. The lines were (are) everywhere and stretched (ran) in all directions. Some were directly in front of me and I simply had to move forward on my journey. Other lines ran (stretched) parallel to my movement and I had to turn right, left, northwest, northeast, to meet them. Those lines were important because I altered the direction of my life to cross them. Thus I had to contend with all that awaited me along that new path that unfolded before me.

Some lines ran (stretched) off into the distance and appeared to disappear over the horizon as if they encircled the earth I traveled upon. All lines, even the invisible ones were (are) real and they expressed their realness in the reality of my life and I was taught and eventually learned that once a line is crossed there is no going back over it. The challenge was (is) to keep the lines, even the invisible ones, in sight, press my heels upon, or at the least, against the precarious edges so that I could (can) look back and see and attempt to remember and try to feel what had once existed in my life and who I once had been before I crossed that line.

I stumbled over and across another one of the many, many important lines of my life when I was thirteen years old. It was Bone, the childhood friend two years older than me who procured two bottles of Nature Boy Wine. Before that I had tasted alcohol in the form of beer, on a few occasions. My dad had let me sip his beer a few times when I was really young, before I was eight. My older cousins had let me sip their beers, but I wasn't impressed. My brother and I had found a bottle of my dad's gin in an old icebox in the garage and we had both taken a sip and I was very impressed because that was the first time I understood the term 'fire water.'

I had heard the catchy ditty about Detroit wines. “What’s the word? Thunderbird. What’s the joy? Nature Boy. What’s the price? Forty-nine twice.” Everyone’s favorite R&B DJ, Frantic Ernie Durham hawked these products on everyone’s favorite station WJLB and now I was going to try one.

Coming out of Detroit, Charlie Milan’s Nature Boy Wine was a fifth of a gallon of twenty percent alcohol by volume. I didn’t (couldn’t) know how strong that really was. There were four of us in the alley behind my house with two bottles. We were supposed to drink half a bottle apiece which would be a little over twelve ounces and I drank (guzzled; downed) my half. I never had a chance to sip, to gradually feel the effect. There was no one to advise me, to share with me that, right then, when I first felt it, was when I had in fact, had enough. In actuality I only needed a sip or two and I was under the influence as I later came to understand that I was very sensitive to alcohol. I probably could have smelled it and gotten high.

I crossed that line, catapulted over and beyond it and it disappeared and thus I lost it. It would be almost a quarter of a century before I diligently and very seriously attempted to find it once again. I was drunk (snockered; inebriated; intoxicated) when I left that alley. But even more important I was strong, fearless, euphoric and free. Everything was all right. I went into that dark, shadowy, narrow alley as one young person and came out as someone else. Once I was who I was and then became who I was not.

On the Essence of Fire

The essence of fire, how unique it is in its ability to express its realness and reveal itself as it imposes that essence into (upon) reality. Fire, shows an attribute of that essence as it produces light and says, "I am illumination in the darkness, follow me." Fire, which emanates an attribute of that essence as it exudes warmth and opposes the cold.

Then there is the visible essence of fire, the flame. The flame, an attribute of fire that, depending on what (who) it burns and what (who) it consumes, can be yellow and red with elements of orange and blue and alter to white hot and thus express itself in various colors, and crackle and pop and roar in different voices. The flame that says, "Listen to me, how loud I am how quiet I can be. Look at me, how attractive I am, how pretty I can be."

So, the question is, how did I learn about fire and not just its varying attributes but its intrinsic essence which is its ability to create that which lies beyond warmth which is heat? How is it that I as human, have no doubt, no uncertainty that if I touch a flame I will burn? I am human so I must not just know, or understand a supposed truth but I must also feel (believe) that truth before it becomes real to me.

See there! The flame! There, is both the representation of the beauty of fire and the wonderful instructiveness of its essence. I only need to come close to it. I only need to move into its sphere to know it. Somewhere in that knowledge and belief of the outcome of the heat that lies within that flame is something more, perhaps passed down since the beginning, immediately after the discovery of the reality of fire by the humankind is that from that flame and through that heat there comes a searing pain and a reminder in obvious form of a scar that will fade but due to extensive damage of the endings of the nerves, will never disappear completely.

On Sunday morning July 23, 1967 the young lady I was dealing with called me around seven. We had been out drinking and partying and getting high that Saturday night and she had me take her to her sister's house, who lived near 12th Street. In her voice was both excitement and fear. She said people were running past the house with clothes and food

and bottles of liquor. She said she could see and smell smoke from fires and people had banged on the door and told her sister that 12th Street was burning, in flames.

Forty minutes later I was standing on one side of 12th Street watching the other side burn. There it was, fire! Fire, that had been used throughout history for light and warmth and the cooking of food and the torture and execution of humans and to wage warfare was burning not just bars and restaurants and businesses but surrounding homes where families lived. I had never seen flames like that or seen and smelled acrid gray-black smoke such as that. I could feel the heat, hear the brick and plaster and wood and all that was being consumed sound out its demise as I observed this conflagration and although I never moved forward the heat came closer to me as the flames rose, the intensity increased and I had to back up to avoid being burned and finally I turned and as I hurried away I could feel the essence of fire, the heat at (on) my back.

Of course at a very young age I learned (knew; felt; believed) that which was necessary to protect *myself* against the heat and thus the possibilities of fire. My mom always cooked on a gas stove, as did I until I relocated to California and attempted to use electric stoves and ovens. There was no flame, no way to judge the medium or high heat. Initially I scorched and overcooked my food. So how did I learn early on about that which was not visible through a flame? How did I come to know and believe in the potential, the threat of the heated iron or the ash-covered coal? All I had to do was reach my hand out to it, move close to it and when I felt, I knew. Perhaps that very first time my mom simply said, as I moved toward the danger,

“Stop! Stop!”

“No! No!”

“Hot! Hot!”

“Burn! Burn!”

What can I say to that person (young; old) who has never tried, perhaps thinking of trying alcohol or some (any) new drug? How can I impart some meaningful warning or advice as to how to avoid stepping over that line or how to ignore that friendly call or how to resist that forceful push

(pull)? To those who have already crossed the line I say, "Go back! Go back as far as you can!" It means very little or nothing at all for me to say that due to alcohol and drugs I have scars inside of me you cannot see and I've felt pain you need not feel. I will simply say this, as your hand moves closer to that drink of alcohol or reaches for that drug,

"Stop! Stop!"

"No! No!"

"Hot! Hot!"

"Burn! Burn!"

The Power and Influence of Destiny

In early June of 1952 my destiny was met. It was not singular in that it pertained to only me, one person of an estimated one hundred and fifty-eight million people in the United States at that time, but of course my destiny belonged only to me. I contracted polio, (poliomyelitis; infantile paralysis) a disease that has been in existence for thousands of years, known of since prehistory with depictions of the effects of the disease in ancient art. I was one of 57,628 recorded cases that year of which 3,145 people died including 1,873 children. I believe I was a recorded one.

More than likely I was infected at Rouge Park when my dad and mom took my brother and me on a picnic and we ran and played and then stripped down to our underwear and went into a wading pool with long poles that spouted water over us. I must have ingested some of that water and it was contaminated with the virus. Polio is an infectious disease that attacks the central nervous system and is highly contagious and has no cure. Once it is contracted the eventual outcome can vary greatly from no symptoms at all to total paralysis and even death. In between that range there is most often, mild muscle weakness in the legs, fever, sore throat, headaches, neck stiffness, and various degrees of pain in the arms and legs, to a disappearance of symptoms and a full recovery.

As would be proven to be the case throughout my life, I was fortunate (lucky) and even though I struggled for years to accept my condition I always understood that in my case it could have been much, much worse. It was if I had been lightly touched. The muscles in my left leg, more so from the knee down were severely weakened and my left foot almost completely lost function. My left thigh was slightly smaller than my right. My lower left leg thereafter would be abnormally small and my left foot would grow to seven and one half inches with my right eventually being nine and one half inches.

I stayed in the hospital from June through mid-December and when I was released, for support, and to allow me to walk heel to toe, I wore a heavy brace on my left leg with metal that ran along both sides from just below my knee into the heel of the shoe. I would wear some type of brace

until I refused to wear one when I started high school. At that time I decided I would rather walk almost a mile and a half for over two years until I started driving, than wear shoes that indicated I was a cripple.

My right leg grew faster than my left and I walked with a pronounced limp. I had an operation in nineteen fifty-nine, when I was ten years old, on the growth plate in my right leg to slow the growth which allowed my left leg to gradually catch up, nearly completely, to my right. I have a three-inch scar on both sides of my leg close to and just below my kneecap. My dad was nearly six feet tall, my mom was five feet seven inches, my sister, eight years younger than me would reach five feet ten inches and my brother would be six feet two inches. I was fortunate (lucky) to eventually reach five feet eight inches in height.

When I was twelve I had two operations on my left leg at the same time. The five-inch scar on the outside of my leg that runs from near the bottom of my foot upwards is from where a tendon was moved to give me more stability at the ankle. The one-inch scar on the top of my foot is from where a muscle was shifted to assist me in lifting my foot and minimize the condition of drop foot that was a natural occurrence from the weakness of my muscles used to lift my foot. The next year I had my final operation, again on my left foot. My abnormally curled big toe was permanently straightened which meant I wouldn't stub my toe as much when I walked without shoes.

How thankful I would ultimately become that my mom, especially, and my dad also, enjoyed going to parks. In the midst of the worse polio outbreak in the history of the United States, when theaters were dark, camps and schools closed, crowds were shunned and of course no one went to public pools, my parents took my brother and me outside to eat Hygrade Hotdogs and Better Made Potato Chips, drink Faygo red pop and play in the water. It was on that June day that I would arrive at the right time and at the correct place to encounter my destiny that would add a dimension to my life that would make my journey unique, as in fact each individual journey becomes. Polio, the bane of my existence for so many years of my life would become a gift, not in overcoming it, but in the attempt to come to terms with its powerful influence.

Into the Dark Cauldron

I spent thirty days in Century City Hospital. Cocaine had suppressed my appetite but while there I ate well and regained the weight that I had lost, and then some. Except when I was married and stuffing *myself* with food destined for the garbage disposal, I had never weighed more than one hundred and sixty pounds. The unlimited amount of hospital food and snacks had quickly gotten me almost to that weight so two weeks before my discharge I started an exercise program in the gym, determined to get back to one forty-five, one fifty at the most. I also had an extensive physical and blood work done. I asked my doctor what, if anything could be done about my left foot and leg, perhaps some new surgical procedure of some kind? He sent an orthopedic doctor to examine me. That doctor said he found no tendons or muscles that could be moved and he advised against any type of cosmetic surgery in an attempt to alter the size of my leg.

We discussed Post Polio Syndrome and how people my age and older, having been some of the last to contract the disease in the United States, were being monitored in an attempt to document and understand the long-term effects and any return of symptoms. He suggested I get fitted for one of the latest style braces being produced. A hard impression was taken of my leg and a cast was created to produce a plastic brace I could wear.

When I got out of rehab I stayed at Gregory's townhouse, a young man (White) everyone called Greg, who I had met in the 'program,' a reference henceforth meant to mean AA, CA or NA (Alcoholics Anonymous; Cocaine Anonymous; Narcotics Anonymous). I needed a place to stay and he wanted me to help him stay sober when he got out, again. He had completed thirty days three weeks after I arrived and in our time there together we had grown close. He was a nice guy dealing with his demons, as we all were and when he was discharged he had gone out, immediately gotten drunk, scared himself as to how serious his situation was and came back for another thirty days. He wanted me to watch his empty place and be there when he was next released.

Two days after my discharge I went to an orthopedic office in Beverly Hills to pick up my brace. It was a one-piece durable plastic construction. My foot fit snugly in the bottom and the back of it, at my calf, ran up to just below my knee and strapped tightly at the top. I put it on, pushed it into my brown lizard shoe and I knew I would be able to cover it with a sock and hide it from the world. I walked out and felt (thought; believed?) I was a different person. It was as if with no more drop foot I could walk with a new degree of confidence across the earth.

When I got in the car I paused to think of several of those I had gotten to know in the hospital, in the group sessions. It was as if we were all in a conflict together, a battle, a war even. And though the enemy was different for some of us, dealing with heroin or pills or food or some other substance, the goals were the same, to get and stay sober, to improve our health, to acquire a measure of peace in our lives. We had spilled out our problems and what we believed to be the reasons we had ended up where we were. Now we were out in the world again, together in our purpose but actually alone in that endeavor and we were vulnerable without the weapons we had used to protect ourselves.

What about me? Hadn't I expressed my belief that everything revolved around polio and all it had done to me? My sense of inferiority, a feeling that we all confessed to having, was real in that I could see it, no matter how hard I attempted to hide it. I could feel it no matter how hard I tried to ignore it. My trauma had broken into reality.

I watched the beautiful people and fine automobiles passing me by as I sat there near Wilshire Boulevard. And as I tried to wiggle my toes and move my foot around in the brace, I had a vague understanding that what I faced was much more than the physical limitations of my body. Our counselor in the hospital, Don, would tell us there was more to what we faced than just staying sober. He told us to get some help, therapy if possible. He said we had to continue to work on ourselves, to grow, to change. He told us of a good friend of his who stayed sober for twenty-two years and then went out, we called them scouts in the program, never made it back and died homeless in the street. Over and over again he reminded us it was an inside job.

I stayed with Greg after he got out, until right before Thanksgiving. I found another place ten minutes from my job, which I was able to keep because they couldn't fire me for missing work while in rehab. This was a one-bedroom apartment that cost 600 dollars a month. Cheryl had spent nights with me at Greg's on several occasions but I wouldn't let her live with me when I moved because she was still getting high. She finally tired of staying with various friends and the doctors she worked for encouraged her, admonished her, threatened her and I continued to push her and along with her own reasons she finally went into rehab. After she got out she stayed with me and I helped her get a car and then she moved in with Darlene until she eventually found a place of her own. She and I would stay in contact for another eleven years before we drifted apart and as far as I know she never went down that road we had been on alone, together, again.

The first thing I did when I rented my apartment was get financing from a fellow program member I had met at a meeting, who owned a furniture store, and completely furnished the place. I bought bedroom accessories and everything I needed for the kitchen and bathroom. I immersed myself in the AA and CA programs and occasionally joined my NA relatives. In many ways we were all the same. I went to meetings, took people to meetings and attended aftercare at Century City Hospital with people I had been in there with and with other alumni of New Beginnings. I had once asked my counselor, Don, what were we to do when we had been out a while, had stayed sober and moved away from the active disease? How would we remember how we were? He said we go to meetings and share, tell our story so we wouldn't forget. So I shared, told my story by the Anonymous meeting's structure of standing before the group and stating my first name, and admitting to being, in my case, an alcoholic and drug addict and telling what it was like, what happened and what it was like now.

Most AA meetings I just said alcoholic since many alcoholics looked down on CA and NA members and some CA and NA members viewed AA members with disdain. People talked about how much time they had sober, how many days, how many years. One male AA member from New

York shared that he noticed California members did that and on the east coast asking someone how much time they had was being intrusive, like asking how much money they made and talking about one's own sober time was tasteless. He said it wasn't about time it was about quality.

I went to meetings near my former hospital and heard a newscaster I had watched on TV as a young boy in Detroit share about his life, how he had ended up in California and how he reached his bottom. I heard a man say his bottom was reached when he lost his Rolls Royce and only had two Mercedes left. I could relate because part of my bottom was trying to hold on to my Audi. I learned there were of course different bottoms but one definitely had to be met. At the meetings I did as many of my peers did and drank coffee and smoked cigarettes, both drugs with 'ine at the end of their names. I had rarely smoked cigarettes since high school. Occasionally I mentioned to a member of the programs that I wanted to find out why I went as far as I did. Most said they didn't care to know, they wanted to stay sober. Several suggested therapy as had my counselor and I read up on various types of therapies and found that none of them attracted me.

By the spring of 1987 I had backed down off of coffee and quit smoking cigarettes and knew I was growing disenchanted with the programs. I couldn't see myself going to meetings and telling my story, however it may have evolved, for the rest of my sober life, however long that was to be. I wanted to progress beyond the books that I read soon after I moved into my place. The books were on self-esteem, having the courage to create, about the power of my sub-conscious mind and how to let go of fear. One book instructed me to make a tape that I could play as I fell asleep, so I did. The tape had beautiful, soft music and my soft voice was speaking to me and saying encouraging statements and positive affirmations that I was supposed to think and say to *myself* when I thought of my *self* and talked to *myself*. This approach was similar to the therapies that members of the program had told me about and that I had read about.

I needed more, something that I felt was specific to me and who I believed I was and what I considered to be my unique problems. I remembered Buck had left several books with me that I had packed in

those boxes in that other apartment. He had taken his own path before I got out of rehab but somehow I still had those books. One book was an introduction to psychology, a book for college students. I found it and began reading it. The book exposed me to what were at that time considered to be the five main approaches to psychology and the main proponents of those different approaches. There was the Neurobiological, Behavioral, Cognitive, Humanistic and Psychoanalytic and there was the father of Psychoanalysis, Doctor Sigmund Freud.

I was taken back to my isolated times in my first apartment in California, in 'The Jungle' when I had nothing to do but read. One of the books I read was *The Passions of the Mind* about Doctor Freud's life and his development of Psychoanalysis and I had been impressed. But what I had been most attracted to was the emphasis placed on all that was contained in the childhood of a human being.

I found a bookstore at Venice Beach that had an extensive inventory of Doctor Freud's writings and as I began reading and studying them I crossed another line and embarked upon a journey deep into my own mind and soul. It was as if I acquired a therapist and entered therapy.

First I told the Doctor my story, about my polio and what I knew of my childhood. I shared all I could of my personal secrets that no one knew but me. I confessed to the Doctor that I grappled with the things I thought and felt, especially when I was by *myself* and even in crowds I often felt alone. That I had regrets and remorse and shame and weighted thoughts and feelings, not just about the reality that surrounded me but thoughts that at times consumed me and feelings about *myself* that were real inside of me that only I believed I felt. I told him I battled with alcohol and drugs but knew there was more to that struggle than the substances I used. I asked if he could help me? Was there anything he could do to take me away from the person I now was and assist me in being the person I had not yet become but wanted desperately to be?

Doctor Freud shared with me that 'habit,' 'alcoholic,' 'addict,' were all simply words that didn't really explain anything. He said not everyone who takes drugs or consumes alcohol becomes 'addicted' to them. He emphasized that treatments involving abstinence can only succeed on the

surface. They only remove the substances from the presence of the person (patient). He expressed that as a human it would be very difficult to give up a pleasure completely but only exchange one pleasure for another, taking on a substitute. He said by discovering the root causes of my needs to drink and use drugs I could lessen that power over me and I could then choose to find a measure of gratification through a new reality less dangerous and less damaging that allowed me to move closer to the balanced human being I desired (wanted) to be and that eventually I could indeed be set free from the cumbersome chains that bound me.

He pointed out that in the process of Psychoanalysis there must be acceptance. First, I had to accept that there were unconscious mental processes that existed inside of me. Second, it was imperative I accept my struggle in my attempt to let go, give up, my continued desire to obtain (possess) the unattainable other (mother) and the internal battle in which I was engaged as I tried to separate *myself* from (destroy) the all powerful other (father) in my quest to become independent. Lastly, and most important, I had to appreciate and accept the power of my sexuality in the creation and sustaining of my problems (symptoms). These were the keys, he said, and to reject the keys would mean I would never unlock the doors and step beyond the restricted rooms in which I now existed.

I accepted the tenets of Psychoanalysis, driven by a sense of dread of all that awaited me if I began to drink and use drugs again as I had done before. At that time, in the beginning, I had thoughts of hope, however, I did not feel belief. In the writings of Doctor Freud I wanted to not just discover knowledge but also to uncover understanding. I started by seeking that which I knew pertained specifically to me but first I had to find out what the *It* (Id) was.

The Doctor explained the *It* (the Id) was the deep shadowy darkness of my mind and thus my personality. The *It* (Id) could be regarded as negative in character. There, within me was chaos, a cauldron, a reservoir of seething emotions and excitations. The *It* (Id) was filled with instinctual (sexual, aggressive) needs which have mental representations (ideas) connected to those needs and quantities and qualities of energy also joined to those wishes and memories. Yet, the *It* (Id) is unorganized, with no

harnessing of a collective will. The *It* (Id) only continuously seeks, strives relentlessly, pushes upwards for satisfaction of those instinctual needs. In other words, the *It* just wants.

The *It* (Id) does not contain reason and the laws of logical thought do not apply. Above all else there is no such thing as contradiction. Opposing wishful impulses and desires exist side by side without cancellation, without one in any way diminishing the other, at the most converging to create a compromise. Within the *It* (Id) there is not any existence of 'no' or anything related to negation. There is no space or time, no conceptual idea of time, no such occurrence as the passage of time and thus the mental processes, thoughts, memories, that exist within the *It* (Id) are not affected or altered in any way by any movement of time. The instinctual, wishful impulses, which have always resided within the *It* (Id) inside of me are in a very real sense, immortal.

The *It* (Id) within me cannot exercise judgments of value. There is no such thing as right or wrong, no good or evil and no morality exists within the *It* (Id) inside of me. Doctor Freud said I now had to sift through my *It* (Id) and find a way to let up into my consciousness and out into reality that which I had spent my life keeping down and running and hiding from through various symptoms, including the use of alcohol and drugs. He told me that all that thrived in the *It* (Id) within me was unconscious to me and he promised he would show me how to not just observe but also how to experience, as a feeling my *It* (Id) and then the *I* (Ego) could make a conscious decision as to what next to do with that newfound knowledge and understanding.

I reached my one year anniversary of sobriety in August of 1987 and went through the end of the year and the first three months of 1988 spending all the time I could in the attempt to discover who I was inside. Fortunately (luckily) my job afforded me a great deal of opportunities in my studies. There were periods of times when I had a lot to do and other times, literally hours each night where I could read the books I brought to work. Some co-workers, of course, found my actions and me strange. Very few, if any of them at that time had known personally someone who had been to rehab. In addition I had either drank alcohol, snorted cocaine

with or sold cocaine to several of them, including my supervisor. Some asked me what school I was going to, what classes was I taking? I even took to covering Doctor Freud's books with novels but was still asked about the books I carried and read constantly.

In April of 1988 a new employee was hired. Olivier was born in France. He was eight years younger than me. He had an American wife who was an artist in the area of painting and graphics and a three-year-old daughter. I would come to believe he was quite possibly a genius, at the least he was very, very talented. He had a vast wealth of knowledge, particularly in the areas of music and philosophy. Not only that, he was a brilliant pianist and composer. For me, what was most important was that in France he had gone through eleven years of psychoanalysis with Jacques Nassif who would become a world famous psychoanalyst, so he also had a unique and extensive knowledge and understanding of Doctor Freud and his teachings.

I had someone to talk to, to share ideas with. He knew psychoanalysis better than anyone I would ever personally know. He knew all aspects of it, technically, academically, and practically and he also introduced me to others who were renowned and who had been involved in some way with the development of psychoanalysis including Carl Jung, Otto Rank, Karl Abraham, Ernest Jones and others. He would eventually tell me about different philosophers and point me to those I could read, that I might enjoy. He was also a nice person with a kind soul. At one point I was struggling with how to recognize the symptoms of my personality and he suggested for me to view everything as a symptom. That advice propelled me forward.

I had known for years, in an elementary sense, about the compulsive obsessive personality. I had seen it portrayed on TV and in movies and read about specific traits. How a person could be overly neat or obvious in their need for order and regimens in their life. I could remember at a young age I would eat the broken potato chips first and save the whole ones for last. I divided popcorn into numbered piles. The way I arranged the food on my plate, saving a small portion of everything for last. The way I sliced my sandwich. I've had people, particularly the women who

were with me, who had commented on the way I arranged the clothes and shoes in my closet, my inability to leave used dishes in the sink and the meticulous washing and waxing of my cars.

When I was growing up I, and most of my friends, wanted to be neat and clean. We wore play clothes and dress clothes and we wanted our dress clothes and school clothes to represent us. We wanted creases in our pants and a shine on our shoes. Now I was looking at myself differently. These were obvious traits (habits) and there were many other things that I did that indicated that I had a particular personality that could be identified but they weren't so very conspicuous or extreme that they would be considered abnormal by others or that severely impacted the quality of my life negatively.

When Cheryl had stayed with me immediately after she got out of rehab we had gone to meetings together and she went to them on her own and within months I had changed direction and moved into my self-analysis. While we were living together I was able to first judge my attitudes in regards to order and what I considered constituted disorder and how those attitudes impacted how I felt about her. I worked nights and there were mornings I would be there as she prepared for work. Once I was lying on the bed with my back to a large chest near me. On that chest were three items, a seashell, a rock and a book, in a specific order. Cheryl took the items off the chest and opened it to get some jewelry out. She searched through her things, found what she was looking for, closed the chest and put the items back on top of the chest, in a different order. I rolled over and quickly glanced at the new placement, rolled back over and attempted to let that, and the feeling I now had, pass, and go to sleep. I was bothered and felt a mild sense of anxiousness by the new order (disorder). I felt it at my back and so I thought about it and then eventually, after she had gone I rolled over, reached to the chest and restored (my) order. I had to smile and chuckle at my actions.

If Cheryl took something from the medicine cabinet, refrigerator or cupboard it could go back anywhere, or not at all. I found all this fascinating, particularly how these actions not only repeatedly made me feel but caused feelings within me about her. I attempted to move toward

acceptance of this lack of control of (my) order and the discomfort that was created. But I didn't understand it. I asked her once if she had ever heard the saying about there being a place for everything and everything having its place? She looked at me, thought a moment and then said no, she had never heard that saying. The very first night I spent with her in her apartment she had to straighten up her bedroom before she let me in it. Her kitchen and living room were a mess and yet I ignored the palpable feeling that the vision of that disorder created within me and rejected a truth I sensed about who I was about to get involved with and got with her anyway.

Now it wasn't just about looking back and remembering. Now, in the present I had to continue looking at and wondering about and questioning not just all I did in the past but also all I thought and felt in the here and now, in reality now, and attempt to influence my future in a positive manner. Why did I do the things I did? Why do I do the things I do? What caused me to feel the way I felt and continue to feel? What caused me to become this way? What does it have to do with my relationship to alcohol and drugs?

The good doctor explained to me that my obsessional illness (neurosis) began as a necessity of fighting off the demands of my libido, which is the term used to describe the energy of the sexual drive of a human being, keeping in mind that this energy is a component of the life instinct. These demands (desires), both sexual and aggressive, positive and negative made up the most important aspects of the complicated battle being waged within me that revolved around me, my mother and my father (Oedipus Complex). The motive force, that which I am trying to defend against, is being cut off from a loved one (mother), and/or losing an object of my love (castration complex).

He went on to say that in my attempt to master my emotional attitudes towards my mother and father, that my personality came to be, and that struggle, and those attitudes exist at the center of my illness (neurosis). In addition, I'm experiencing the effects of premature childhood traumas. An illness such as mine began at such an early point of my life that after such a length of time of existing it becomes like a living independent organism

and manifests as a self-preservative instinct.

He reminded me the battle I was fighting raged across three areas of my mind. Within the *It* (Id), the *I*, (Ego) and not to be ignored or minimized in importance, the *Above I* (Over I; Upper I; Superego). Each area plays its own role and each works in its own way. The *I* (Ego) must deal with reality as well as with the demands of the *It* (Id) and the unduly harsh ethical and moral provisions of that which is the *Above I* (Over I; Upper I; Superego) and which gives energy to my conscience.

The war began, when as a child the *I* (Ego) would repress wishful impulses of a sexual (aggressive) nature. The demands of my infantile sexuality were experienced by me (*I*, Ego) as something dangerous and the *I* (Ego) fought it as something harmful. But the impulse continued to exist in my unconscious, looking for an opportunity to be activated. If it is able to send into consciousness something disguised and unrecognizable, a substitute for that which the *I* (Ego) has repressed, the *I* (Ego) will eventually feel that same essence of danger and harm (anxiety). The substitute for the repressed idea is a symptom.

Once the *I* (Ego) repressed a wishful impulse the *I* (Ego) had to continue to utilize energy to keep it repressed. After each initial act of repression the struggle against the impulse merged into a struggle against the symptom. The *I* (Ego) attempted to make the symptom useful and as the *I* (Ego) constructed and asserted my essence of *self*, the *I* (Ego) utilized the symptom and it became more and more combined with me (*I*, Ego) and more and more indispensable to me (*I*, Ego).

My symptoms fell into specific categories of an obsessional illness. Mine were prohibitions, precautions and expiations. In my self-analysis I would come to believe that to me disorder was prohibited, maintaining order was precautionary and restoring order from disorder was an act that made amends. Thus I became a person of order and arrangement and representations of disorder caused me anxiety to some degree or another.

Again I continued to question as to what it was I was trying to keep down? What was it that was inside me that was continually trying to come up? He reminded me of the three keys. Acceptance of the unconscious, familial struggle involving mother, father, and *myself* and the powerful

influence of my sexuality.

He pointed out that the earliest years of my life were in a very real sense lost to me yet were of the utmost importance. In those first three to five years all that I inherited as a constitution, that made me an individual, came into its own. My disposition and experiences were linked up in a lasting unity. Perhaps, under normal progression from birth to the age of four, my impressions would have also had a common effect. However, the traumas I experienced gave way to abnormal stimulations and fixations and created within me factors in my disposition, which may not have otherwise ever developed. The sexual constitution, which is not only unique, but also peculiar to children, is seemingly designed to provoke sexual experiences that can be classified as traumas. The early rise of my childhood sexuality left behind it decisive instigating factors for my sexual life as an adult. My impressions were so strong because my *I* (Ego) was feeble and immature. My *I* (Ego) had no choice but to fight off what the *I* (Ego) was going through inside except through repression.

Through my inherent disposition and external influences, in my case not just imagined experiences but real physical traumas that obviously extended into and remained in reality, I acquired my capacity and ability to love, that is to say, the conditions I set up for loving and the needs and impulses I sought to gratify through that love and all the aims I set out to achieve within that love. The internal question, or more so challenge, became, was I able not just to love but also to accept love and thereby be loved?

Doctor Freud said all the women I brought or allowed into my life formed a cliché, a stereotype that was repeated over and over again and reproduced itself as my life went on. If the presence of a new *other* triggered within me some level of fear or pain and thus danger, I responded as if still a child and the impulses connected to that female ran its course under an automatic influence and I was compelled to do again the same thing in an attempt to feel inside that which had become real within me and experience in reality the same outcome. What all that was about, only I knew, yet didn't know, but could know, eventually.

However, to reach a higher level of knowledge of *myself* I would struggle through phases of resistance and acceptance. Some traits would be relevant to me, some would not. Each individual is unique but within my (compulsive) obsessive illness there would exist many aspects common to all such as me, indeed, there were others, I was not alone, yet some characteristics for me carried much more significance. It was a matter of quantity and quality.

Self-analysis entailed questioning *myself* constantly as to my motivations. If I can easily state my belief as to the cause of my (detrimental) action or inimical feeling then I have to understand a more than likely underlining reason exists which I am unable to reveal unless I pose the correct questions. Consciousness can only be applied to conscious thoughts. Willpower can only be utilized to control what the *I* (Ego) has access to. It is not ever simply a matter of making up my mind to do or not do something. If it were that easy I would have just decided to stop drinking alcohol and/or using drugs, which of course I had done on numerous occasions. The reality of underlining forces was in the fact I could not sustain that decision of abstinence.

Doctor Freud compared the challenges I faced to an archaeologist who, through excavation, discovers artifacts and remnants of a previous life. From these physical objects that exist in reality the archaeologist analyzes and attempts to uncover, through various methods of comparison and interpretation, the essences of the humans who produced those objects.

I had to look at *myself* in the present (now), at the actions and results (symptoms) that exist and had existed for many years in my life that were (are) real, obvious, clear, plain, perceptible, apparent, evident and distinct and attempt to determine my essence that existed in my life (childhood), in my past. The child, unchanged, lived on not only through my illness, but also within my dreams and buried and hidden in my artistic expressions.

He continued. In the discoveries that awaited me as I attempted to heal *myself* I would find that the inseparable relationship between love and hate within me, among all the characteristics of my obsessional illness, was the most important. In opposition to my intense love there existed a powerful hatred. Because of these two opposing forces I found it difficult,

if not impossible to make a confident decision on anything or anyone (female) when my actions should be motivated and driven by love. In all my relationships with women I was filled with doubt and insecurity and that doubt was related to my own internal doubt and indecision because my love was inhibited by my hatred.

If I doubted my own love I may, perhaps must, to some degree or another, doubt every little thing. The chronic coexistence of love and hatred within me, when directed toward the same person and both of a high intensity indicates the existence and role of my unconscious. My love should have of course overpowered the hatred but because my love did not extinguish the hatred I only drove it down into my unconscious and there it was protected from being destroyed.

My hatred persisted and grew and as a reaction formulated against it, my conscious love more than likely attained an especially high degree of intensity, even if only in my fantasies and daydreams. There in my imagination my wishes were moved between three periods. The current time, the present, which roused intense desires, earlier experiences, generally belonging to childhood when the now unconscious wishes were fulfilled and the future where I again hoped the fantasies would come true.

The splitting off of my love and hatred happened at a very young age. The more passionately I loved an object, the more sensitive I became to disappointments and frustrations from that object. My mother, the first object of my love, was of paramount importance to my mental and emotional life as a child. My childhood demands for love were intense, immediate, and sought exclusivity and I tolerated no sharing. The doctor emphasized that my constant, and although hidden, undeniably strong sense of inferiority had powerful erotic roots. As a child I would (unconsciously) feel inferior if I noticed that I was not loved. If that were a reality that was coupled with the reality of my inferiority through a crippling disease there would be no path by which I could escape the effects of inferiority, both imagined and real. One of my tasks was to determine, objectively, if my mother truly loved me, as I specifically needed to be loved, or not.

The good doctor reiterated that another very important aspect of the

foundation of my personality was established when as a child I had experienced (undergone) repeated object losses (castration) and as an adult I was still prepared, constantly looking and listening for that to occur again. Each and every attack of anxiety (unease) I would feel, pertaining to the *other* (female), was a signal of potential danger re-emerging and meant I was reacting to a tremendous loss and traumatic separation from the early years of my life.

The structure of my personality was built from the foundation through repression and he said it was imperative that I understand and ultimately accept that the majority of content that I initially repressed, and thus was forced to continually repress, and all that was associated with that content, revolved around my thoughts (sexual, aggressive) and autoerotic actions (sexual, aggressive) as I collided with the phallic (sexual) stage while I was in the hospital separated from my mother and father.

At the explosion of my sexuality upon reaching puberty, the impulses that dominated my autoerotic activities succumbed to the pull and push of the original infantile prototypes with which I already battled. My sexual dysfunction had begun long before my teenage years and long before the perverse sexual experimentation in which I was involved and in which I involved others between my eighth and thirteenth year of age, when I first got drunk off of alcohol.

Doctor Freud knew of and explained that my unchecked autoerotic activity was in fact the primary addiction. Autoeroticism and addiction have in common the reality that both produce a pleasure without the initial need of the *other*. Yet both alcohol and drugs became my *other*, and my addictions and autoerotic activities were directly related to my attempt to reduce and temporarily eliminate both my mental and emotion pain. My encounters with the *other*, in reality, brought with them elements of risk, unpredictability and unease (anxiety). Alcohol and drugs minimized the unease (anxiety) and were in fact substitutions for my primary addiction.

He said there were steps to be taken. Now I had to look, in a penetrating fashion at all that I would henceforth discover about *myself* and accept all truthful revelations exposed to me and that in my quest to know, through self-analysis, I would be aided by a predominant feature of

my obsessional personality, and that is my overwhelming need to know. My thinking, grounded in both reality and abstraction would mean once I made up my mind to know, I would be driven by both conscious and unconscious motivations and energy and that the strength of that power would be both required and utilized to interrogate *myself*. He encouraged me to place, all that I could, that existed within my unconscious, under the critical examination of my mind. He said it was inevitable that I would be relentless because it was obvious that brooding, which is an altered form of thinking was a preponderating feature of my constitution. My thought process itself had become sexualized and the sexual pleasure which is normally attached to the content and ideas of my thinking had shifted onto the act of thinking itself.

He knew clearly, a secret of mine and what only I believed I knew, however vaguely, and had wondered about, agonized over, deeply, in periods of my aloneness that there was something strange about my thinking (brooding). The flashing, sparking thoughts that ran and rushed and streaked and dashed and raced and danced through my mind brought me a great deal of gratification and for me, making a discovery and reaching a conclusion had strong elements of climatic pleasure.

The good doctor said I had to allow the repressed material inside of me to come up and then work through it. I had to resist an aspect of my reality that as a human being was inherent to me. I would have an inclination to consider something as untrue if it was disagreeable to me.

Finally, he told me to never forget that my lost and forgotten childhood activities and memories and the symptoms and problems that arose from them are as puzzles and riddles that I had to figure out. When I completed the puzzles and solved the riddles my illness will no longer be able to exist in its present form or sustain its current strength. He said it was similar to a fairy tale where the influence and power of evil spirits is broken and dissipates when you tell them their names, which they have kept secret.

The Return Home

I spent all of 1988 concentrating on ‘working through’ that which I discovered about *myself*. I was fortunate that my sobriety had been relatively smooth and without any serious incidents. I had occasionally wanted a drink of alcohol, especially beer. It wasn’t as if I was jonesing or fiending as we called it in my youth. It was more of a want than a powerful craving. I would try to figure what was going on in my life, what was I feeling that would make me suddenly start thinking about alcohol and drinking? It concerned me because I had recognized a compulsive aspect of my personality in that, if I had thoughts that involved an action I would experience a level of anxiety if I didn’t complete the act. If I thought, “I should mop the floor,” and didn’t mop the floor I would become anxious and the *Above I* (Over I; Upper I; Superego) would punish me with admonishing thoughts that I had failed to do what I said I should (would) do. I had to counter those punishing thoughts with appeasing thoughts that delayed the action or in fact complete the act or at the least do something that required physical energy. So it was dangerous for me to have thoughts, however fleeting, of having (needing) a beer.

I also found that if I drank something carbonated, like club soda or tonic water the craving dissipated. I recalled an acronym I learned in the program, which was HALT. We were reminded to never get too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired and I would find that often times I was simply hungry or tired. I would have to look and search diligently for the anger and loneliness.

So, not only did I sift through the past but also I constantly monitored my emotions in the present. Now living in abstinence, without the altering substances of alcohol and drugs, I was forced to deal with the world straight up, including the people in that world, specifically the women, through the reality of who I really was.

Cheryl had moved by late summer so I was also in a state of sexual abstinence in its true physical form having vowed to refrain from all autoerotic activities. I had, in my past, gone without sex for significant periods of time so that was almost a normal state for me, as was being

alone, but I was not lonely. I had my books, my writing and of course, my thoughts. There always and forever, at least as long as I was alive, would be me (*I*; Ego), *It* (Id), and that which attempted to keep me in line, my conscience (*Above I*; Over I; Upper I; Superego).

Cocaine had not pressed upon me but I stayed on the lookout for it. It wasn't as if I could go down to the corner store and purchase it and I wasn't about to contact anyone from my past who knew I had gone to rehab so they could mock me or look down at my attempt to change. That was a matter of pride and what I had come to believe kept many people, especially early on, in the program, sober. They didn't want to be on the outside, ostracized or looked down upon for getting high after more or less saying publicly that they had quit. The group (peer) influence and pressure of the program is very strong and one of its most positive aspects. However, I knew that if *It* (Id) really wanted to get high there would have been nothing *I* (Ego) could have done. *It* (Id) was first, there when I was born and was, and always would be, more powerful, containing more energy, than any other region of my being.

When I was snorting cocaine the effects were gradual and *I* (Ego) was able to maintain some level of control although it was a drug that was a pure representation of the *It* (Id). The properties of the drug raised the level of dopamine in my brain reward circuits, the circuits that control the sense of pleasure, especially when I smoked it, to such a degree that *I* (Ego) immediately lost all control and thereafter *It* (Id) just wanted and what *It* (Id) wants, *It* (Id) gets, in one form or another. Cocaine, for me, became that form of pleasure that was not to be denied. I could remember there at the end of my run when I could purchase a quarter ounce, cook up a little, take one hit and as the feeling rushed into me I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I was getting ready to smoke all of it, even if it took two days.

Then there came the paranoia that frightened me and the thoughts that followed, that not only alarmed me but also punished me and eventually overwhelmed the pleasure. Without sex I didn't need the replacement for sex, which had been cocaine. The drug had scared and scarred (burned) me in such a way that the thoughts of using cocaine, and I had them, on

occasions, had virtually no energy behind them, mostly a feeling of fear.

In New Beginnings, Don, our counselor had spoken to us in group session about a concept I had found fascinating. He called it Sexual State Dependency. He explained it as alcohol and drugs being a constant component in our (my) sexual life. In other words when we had sex we were most likely under the influence. We needed to use substances that assisted or allowed us to more freely engage in our sexual activities. We depended on those substances.

I remembered watching a show as a teenager, when I had just become sexually active with others, (females) the objects of my desires. The show was Candid Camera. A hidden camera recorded the reactions of people in situations that were designed to create humor. The host had a married couple, a male and female, in a room and after they all talked for a while he asked if they would be willing to go into the bedroom next door and have sex and then come back and fill out a survey for research purposes. The husband and wife looked at each other and smiled slightly and then the woman turned to the host and said, "Can I have a drink first?" She didn't mean water.

Why, after almost twenty-five years did I remember that? Why was I affected by that situation and question? I knew then, and at that time in my life accepted unequivocally, that alcohol and then drugs played an important role in my sexual life. Not only did I use but also I enticed young girls to use and quite often the girls requested alcohol and/or drugs as a condition of being sexually active with me.

In looking back I realized how fortunate (lucky) I had been as a young boy in how others, especially my classmates and friends treated me when it came to my handicap. I was rarely teased and I never wanted to be felt sorry for and to a great extent I was treated as one of the group. I played all the sports, as best I could and was only restricted by adults or peers on rare occasions. I know I would have remembered each and every slight if it had caused me pain because I came to realize how sensitive I was. I never wanted to be teased so I refrained from teasing others, what was called 'playing the dozens' or 'screaming' on each other. Doctor Freud explained to me there were degrees of viciousness and hatred that resided

beneath both teasing and some jokes, and there was a reality of meanness that could exist in the actions of someone doing something and then saying they “were just playing.”

Throughout my youth and into my adult life the sensitivity extended into what I considered to be acts or words of disrespect which could be interpreted as treating me or talking to me in an insensitive manner. To be disrespected, whether it was real or simply perceived as such, symbolized to me that I was less than, inferior to, and therefore was not worthy of respect.

In our senior year of high school our graduating class went on a trip to Washington, D.C. On the bus the president of the class took my seat when I got up to talk to someone. I stood beside him and demanded my seat back and he said he wasn't moving. He played football and the football coach was sitting with his wife one row in front. I kept demanding and the president wouldn't move. I asked the coach to make him move. I felt all eyes on me, the vice president of the class. I told the president if he didn't move we were going to fight, right here on this bus. He finally got up and went back to his seat. I never forgot the incident, the obvious sign of disrespect. But what I regretted most in my memories was not punching him, not attacking him, not fighting him.

If part of the foundation of my personality is a powerful sense of unconscious and/or conscious inferiority then if I am made to feel inferior I will either be extremely pained (hurt) or extremely angry. The source of my anger is the strong sense of unconscious hatred inside of me. For years I couldn't let it go. The thought of the incident evoked powerful emotions within me of pain and hate. My classmate, who I hated, the president, died an early death and I still held on to that memory in a negative way. Once I better understood me inside, I was able to begin to let it go.

Of course, sometimes I deserved to be chastised but I was still pained by the words. And even when my mom or dad believed I deserved to be spanked which they rarely did, and they came for me, switch in hand, I still ran, fearing the punishment and the aftermath. Before I was ten years of age I broke out several windows in the garage and they, the angry parents, had to catch me to whip me, the angry and fearful young boy.

Still I did my best, all I could, to avoid being yelled at or disappointing someone when I was young, such as my teachers or making anyone of authority angry with me. I didn't want to be punished. It was for me to look at the punishment doled out by my parents. How was it administered? Was it countered with hugs and kisses, words of forgiveness and displays of love?

Now in looking back from a different perspective with a different understanding that came from new knowledge I came to understand that for me the act of punishment went down to something deep inside of me and that's why I felt it so acutely. To be punished by specific actions or words potentially led to being cut off from the punisher and if I cared about them and believed they cared about me I feared that form of separation (castration). I learned in the hospital that patients who were nice and compliant and didn't cause trouble were treated better than those who caused problems. As I got older and went to my appointments the nurses and doctors seemed to be glad to see me coming. I was friendly and I tried to make them laugh. I didn't want them to cut me off. I knew I needed them. So as part of that foundation of my personality, alongside a powerful sense of inferiority and hatred was a strong sense of fear, all existing deep in my unconscious.

I recalled two important incidents from my past that left an indelible impression on me and that as long as I can remember I will never forget. The first was when I lived in the Atlanta area, in College Park, Georgia and I was in the club, Mr. V's Figure 8, in 1980. I saw a young woman I was attracted to and so I leaned over and began talking to her as she sat in a booth drinking with several other women. I said hello and asked her how she was doing and if she was enjoying herself. I explained I hadn't seen her there before and I asked where she was from. She said she was from Newnan (Georgia) and I commented, "Really, born and raised in Newnan?" And she responded with anger (hatred?) in her eyes and sharpness (venom?) in her voice, "No born and reared in Newnan. Animals are raised, people are reared!" At that time I couldn't describe the emotions that rushed up inside of me. All I know is the only thing I could do was turn and walk directly out of the club and go home and lie on my

couch and stare at the ceiling.

The other incident was in April of 1986, just months away from going into rehab. Seven of us from work had flown to Chicago, Illinois to run a simulated disaster recovery. The system administrators and programmers would load all our necessary programs into the computers at this off-site data center and my area, operations, would then load all of the data from the backup tapes we had created the night before and attempt to run through our processes as if it were a normal day.

It would be a rough trip for me although the business side went fairly well. I had bought a half-ounce of cocaine two days before the trip so I hadn't had much sleep. I drank a little, not much, on the nearly four-hour flight. I snorted dope in the bathroom all the way there and got up so much the co-worker I had to go past made a comment and I told him I had a weak bladder.

Operations wasn't scheduled to begin our work until the next afternoon after arrival so three of us went to a club that night and I continued getting high. I brought three young women and two young men back to my room with me after the club and we kept the party going. They left when the sun was coming up and I lay across the bed and closed my eyes. Less than two hours later the phone rang. Everything had gone so well that the first group had completed their work early and we would be picked up in an hour to begin our tasks. Naturally I snorted dope throughout the day.

When operations was done we went back to our rooms to change because all of us were going to a club to celebrate our successful disaster simulation. While I was getting dressed, and snorting dope, the TV was on and I heard on the newscast that there was a possibility of snow flurries that night, after all, this was April in Chicago. At the club I was nearly staggering, not from being drunk but I was weak from lack of sleep and the dope wasn't energizing me but only numbing me. I saw a woman sitting at the bar that I instantly liked and so I went, stood beside her and ordered a drink. The bartender handed me my drink and I paid, tipped him and turned to the nice looking woman and said, "I'm visiting from California, you don't think it's going to snow while I'm here do you?" When she turned to me I recognized the look and I felt the knife, barely,

when she cut me with her reply, “Who do I look like, the weatherman?” She responded. It was so quick and witty I would have laughed or at least chuckled, if she had been making a joke. But there was no joking in the look in her eyes or the sound of her voice. I went in the restroom stall and snorted some dope, cleaned my nose and turned my glass up and emptied it. Then I went back to the celebration. Once again the alcohol and drug, my protection, had saved me from all those things that attempted to rise up inside of me.

Now, as I went over incidents I looked for themes and patterns that were connected to what was emerging as the foundation and thus the structure of my personality. I had not imagined their attitudes, again, the anger in their eyes or the harsh sounds in their voices. I realized there was no way I could interpret, at least not yet, why they had reacted to me the way they did. I could however, strive to interpret why I was so very sensitive to the words of these strangers who I would never speak to or see again. Why had I reacted and felt the way I did, as if they had done more than look and speak but had actually placed hard, heavy hands upon my chest or sharp, pointed fingernails against my face? Why did I remember it so well? Even when the images of how they looked have escaped and disappeared, the feelings they created within me remain and are still there to bubble up.

Of course, their response, without smiles or elements of jest in their voices, I believed represented one of my greatest fears. There, was the symbolic cutting off (castration) that I wanted to avoid as much as anything else. But there was more to it than that. It wasn’t just the situation I wanted to dodge, it was the feelings that were created within me from that situation. But I was confused because there was more than just pain and anger. I was missing or ignoring something and I had to find out what that was.

As the winter approached I was finishing what I would consider my first complete book. The stories (poems) I had been writing since the late 1960s had been put into what I viewed as three separate books. The titles were *White Rains*, *Window Pain*, and *Redemptive Journeys*. Now this final section would complete the book I would title *Thru The Fire*.

I knew through my studies of Doctor Freud's theories and discoveries that I had a strong capacity for what he had called sublimation. He explained that fortunately (luckily), as a mechanism of defense against my unconscious desires I was able to place my sexual energy onto creative endeavors and gain a measure (degree, quantity, quality) of gratification from those activities. But not only did I enjoy thinking (brooding) but also all derivatives related to words such as reading and writing. I remembered being told in my past by a couple of friends who I had grown up with and by my peers from the streets that I thought too much and read too much. A good friend from high school, a ladies man, once told me, as I isolated on the east side of Detroit and drank and used and took LSD and mescaline that I was going to lose my mind thinking of weird stuff and reading strange books. He said I should put those books down and go out to a club and get me a woman.

As I came closer to better understanding who I really was I realized the external pressure I had been under to do many things that I didn't really want to do. In actuality I enjoyed (loved) reading and writing and enjoyed (loved) not just the sound of a word but the structure of a word and unknown words and a dictionary could keep me in a state of perpetual excitement.

Now I could look back at my life from the late 1960s through the stories (poems) that I had written at that time, during those moments I was living them. It was as if I had left marks or signposts that pointed and directed me to that which existed deep inside me. The essence of my illness was reflected in reality through something that could be held in my hand and observed with my gaze and felt in my soul.

In elementary school I had an art teacher (Colored; Negro; Black; African American) named Mrs. Haywood. She had several sayings that she would repeatedly shout at us to settle down children not yet twelve years old. I remembered two very well. One was "Get your feet off the floor," when she wanted us to sit down. The other, which usually caused us to pause and try to figure out what she meant was, "You better learn how to read between the lines." The first saying, when viewed as abstract and outside of all tangible possibility, could have been her advising us to

raise ourselves, lift our physical being and thus our essence up and above where we were at that time and strive to exist on a higher level. The second saying, of course we would learn, was rather well known and indicated there was more to what we were reading and seeing and doing and being and we would need to develop the ability to interpret if we were to survive. There was knowledge between the lines and behind the words.

Psychoanalysis has been referred to as the “talking therapy.” The patient talks and the therapist (or patient) listens and interprets what lies behind and beneath what the patient is saying, based upon the problems the patient is experiencing. Doctor Freud discovered there were hidden meanings in what I said and how I said it. Words, and how they are used is of the utmost importance in understanding what existed inside of me. Every utterance could provide insight into my essence and in particular, my unconscious. He emphasized that even a slip of the tongue could have significant meaning. Thus was coined the common term, “Freudian Slip.”

Many of the early stories (poems) sprung up from my unconscious. I had heard and read of people saying that their creations, regardless of what they were, had come to life from a trance-like state. Or, as if they had lost themselves in what they were doing and I understood that concept. The words flowed through me. I could have been consumed by different topics and thus I would have written about different things and used different words but that which came from inside of me was for specific reasons.

Doctor Freud had said obsessional neurotics such as me, displayed, in their thinking, a preoccupation with death, both my own and others in my life and this was most likely due to an attempt to bring to a conclusion outstanding issues or to resolve internal conflicts. This was clearly evident in these two of the 47 stories (poems), titled *I'll Go Alone*, written in 1970 and *Deep Sleep*, written in 1971, illustrated in the following excerpts.

*... I'll spread my wings of misery
I'll slowly lean forward
until I glide with my weight
DOWN
DOWN*

DOWN

*The force of the Wind against my face
would choke me,
If I had left Wind.
Wind would force water to my eyes
If there had been a Wind.
I would feel the warmth of the sun,
If I had left just one.
A bird may have waved at me
as I went downwardly by,
if I left a sky,
and let them fly.
But I'll go alone.
And only me
will hear me sigh*

WHEN

I

DIE

*... Oh Night you are descending
Unlike other times you've come
around me your wants are bending
and contending I am the one.*

*Oh Sleep my Dreams you're spending
and sending deep thru the sky.
Again I embrace darkness unending.
And again I will lie down and die.*

Although I dealt with varied issues and topics, including purely sexual ones, the majority of the stories (poems) in *White Rains*, written from 1969 to 1982 were filled with loneliness and separation and the need to love and be loved.

*... Goodbye.
Thanks for the brief
chance meeting
much too short and
much too fast
by course that's
much too fleeting.*

*To be left alone will never be right.
Goodbye.
Yet even in leaving
I'll forever remember your smiling eyes
and from mine eyes
shall you never leave my sight
In My Mind-1973*

Inside Out was written in 1980 after leaving Mr. V's Figure 8 one night. These were actually the names of the women I met.

*There was Ethel
and Gretal and Rita
and one whose name I will never find out.*

*For we had laughed and danced together.
In the end then
they had walked out.*

*If only
they would have liked me and stayed
eventually
they would have found out.*

*They could have learned
of the wants inside me,
and the thoughts
that I think I'm about.*

*Why most times
are our feelings hidden
unspoken, ergo
Forbidden
and therefore
left inside not out?...*

*... A man alone,
if he's alone then he's without
Too long alone,
Too much inside,
It's so wrong
to be long without ...*

In 1978 I wrote *Sorrowful Love* in the little room I slept in at the cemetery after leaving my wife and (her) daughter.

*It's as though it's an entwining
and seeping mist,
or perchance it's a soft enchanting kiss.
This is the path that created the miss
and thrust me within a fading bliss.*

*This love's fling this sweet love train
is a Devastating thing.
It's cruel and unjust
and it's born from deep pain...*

In looking at my writings, that were created when I was there in the moment, I saw an inside that was seemingly, in many cases, in direct opposition to what I was going through or doing on the outside, in reality. Still I had periods of hope. I wrote *Wasteful Times* in 1975 when I was living in my mom's basement and working towards and planning my escape back to California. I was looking forward to meeting someone (female) again. I would come to learn in the program this move was called a 'geographic.' Moving somewhere with expectations that I, (inside) and things (reality) would miraculously change.

*Although
I've never cast mine eyes upon you.
I've never seen your lovely face.*

*Also,
I have not known the fires
from the heats of your embrace.*

*Yet,
my every-day-dreams upset me
my nights know not their place.*

*And,
it seems already I've been here
twice before I've watched this race.*

*Still,
I'm breathlessly awaiting you
with apprehension but just a trace...*

In what I at the time thought would be the final section to the book I had been piecing together over the years I wrote *Redemptive Journeys*.

Although there was more movement in the stories (poems) and more looking out instead of simply deep subjective introspection there was still darkness, separation, loneliness and the continuing search for love and the need to love. I looked at the themes and patterns and found it fascinating that in spite of all that was going on in my life, while leaving the pressure and violence of Detroit, when I woke up that first morning on the bus to Las Vegas in 1984 I wrote *Those Crying Eyes*.

*I left riding
not knowing
whether or not I was running
or whether or not I was hiding
from a Love I could never find*

*Early morning.
Sun rising. Wind blowing.
I was realizing all these things
at six forty-nine.
Loneliness in my life.
Pain in my heart.
And Love lost
Somewhere in my mind ...*

I nodded off and on throughout that first full day on the bus and barely slept that night. I stared out of the window but there was really nothing to see. Then, as the sun was coming up that next day I wrote *Red Sun Rising*

*The morning sky was grey
dirt grey
and so foreboding.
Falling raindrops screaming
cold raindrops scolding.
The earth unspeaking
her voices holding*

*and I was leaving
many miles unfolding.*

*That first night black
blind black
the stars were hiding.
I pushed on running
I rolled on riding.
My whole world lost
my purpose sliding.*

And I was leaving, I kept on driving.

*Where was I going?
What was I trying?
To ease the pain
and cease the lying.
To drown my sins
in goodness crying.*

To see again the RED SUN RISING ...

Finally, deep into my self-analysis and with almost two full years of sobriety I finished the last section titled *Resolutions* and the book *Thru the Fire* would be complete. The majority of the stories (poems) came more from the conscious area of my mind. I had specific things I wanted to say about specific subjects. The main purpose in writing the last section was to ask questions, suggest answers and share what I had learned, not just through my substance abuse but the contributing factors and what I had done in an attempt to overcome my situation. In *Someone* I wrote of not just the need for parental (guardian) love, support, guidance and protection but the need for humans to provide for fellow humans in need.

*... Someone
be there for those out there
who are lost and alone,
invisible in a crowded world.
Reaching out for a touch
that was never felt.
Listening for words never spoken.
Missing strength and praise never given.
Searching for love never known.
Locked down and frozen in emotional time.
Unable to let the baby within know.
Unable to help the Child within grow.

Unable to let the pain within go.

Turning away and hiding.
Running away and waiting to be saved.

Waiting
and waiting,

for Someone.*

In *Used to Be* I attempted to come to terms with the fear I had of women and specifically the fear I had of how they made me feel.

*... Woman.
Lovely. So beautiful.
So mysteriously strange.
So fresh.
Always so frighteningly wonderfully new.
Reaching out hesitantly to me*

*and I tentatively extending myself to You.
Oh how I used to be afraid of You ...*

*... behind your concealing seductive eyes
reside the answers the reasons why
You act the way You do.
I recognized the hurt
the images of angry disappointment,
the loneliness I knew.
All that time I was afraid of You,*

*You were afraid
of me too.*

Within *When It's Over*, is my attempt to understand and give voice to the sexual relationships I had with women who I met once or twice and never saw again and how those meetings made me feel then and the impressions that were left for me to cope with.

*... To offer myself to a stranger was traumatic to me.
Rejection was always too natural to see.
Then with the end I would turn quickly before they
could turn from me. Realizing something was missing,
I rose with disappointment urging me, to wash away the
dejection. Cleanse away the guilt, the shame, sterilize
the pain and towel away the naked memory.
Retrospective remembrances so vague in passing,
so heavy, so fast, of meaningless emotionless affairs that
never had a chance to last, blown away on the winds
of insecurity ...*

Footsteps was a reminder to me and a suggestion to anyone who read it that it's never too late to attempt to change one's direction in life. That to discover the wrong path is being taken requires a turnaround, or at the least a momentary cessation of movement. Then the digging and excavating must begin and another path must be forged, which means to form by pressing or hammering, with or especially without heat. This difficult, arduous and oftentimes painful work allows for a new shape to be created and a better path to emerge. The only way out, is through.

*... today I know the cognitive dissonance
was in the look of my eyes only
my glance was truly distorted
and my sight had surely been blind.*

*Today
I heed not the discording voices
or follow meandering rhymes.
Today I have new varying choices
that shall waste not my last precious times.*

*I remember the wandering walking
turning a thousand circles
I discovered ten thousand imprints
made by turmoil from circuitous footprints
and each footstep had truly been mine.*

In *Desire*? I wanted to ask relevant questions about why I was here on this earth? Why was I given the chance at life? If it was for me to struggle against a physical handicap and substance abuse and emotional and psychological challenges then as I came to terms with those issues what was there on the other side?

*What do you DESIRE
when you are alone
in the wee moments of the early mourning
when all is dark and silent
and you toss and turn confused
and concerned about the future
of an endless tomorrow, what do you want?
What do you want
when there is just yourself and nobody else?
No one to claim? No one to blame?
No one to lead? No one to follow?
No one to please?
No one to cause pain and sorrow?
Where lie your needs?
Do your whispers turn to the skies
or do you search for the reasons inside?
What do you believe?
Do you believe in magic, sorcery,
incantations, rituals,
pageantry or voodoo?
Do you hold on to gold and paper
and jewels and use them as totems
to sooth the fears to ward off taboos
that push on you and pressure your mind
as you stand there naked in the darkness,
in the dim reflection
of the demanding mirror, what do you wish?
What do you see, when do you look,
into the truth, reach in your mind,
deep in the corners, what do you find?
Who do you ask?
Can you scream out what you really want?
Do you want wisdom and answers
that will build you a bridge*

*across the suffocating mire?
What does your life require?
When will you learn?
That as long as you yearn,
for happiness, through the people,
places and things you acquire,
forever will you lack,
forever will you want.
Never will you satisfy DESIRE.*

Finally, in *Alright Today* I acknowledge where I was, what was going on inside of me in 1988 at the age of thirty-nine. I didn't know how long I had left to live but I knew I had work to do. Each day I lived I had to fight to continue on the path I was on. As the saying goes in the program, I could only take it one day at a time. But I was determined to make each day as peaceful as possible.

*Years. Days. Hours.
Moments gone forever
but that's alright today.
I was lost and confused.
I did not know my way.
But even in the abysmal chasm
I was trying.
Lovers gone, pictures misplaced.
The visages of loveliness begin to fade
never to be seen in clarity again.
Nothing I can do about that.
So, that's alright today.
Another sunrise looms just over the horizon.
I'll keep on trying.*

*If I linger in the past
reminiscing of last years sorrows
I most surely will miss
the beauty of tomorrow.
Only depressions lie in longing
to alter yesterdays.
I'm not afraid to keep on trying.
Should I have tried harder?
Could I have known better?
Regrets, remorse behind me.
Guilt slowly eases away.
In the back of my memories
will I hear what the voices say?
Still I know they shall sometimes call.
But,
that's alright today.
It's better to have loved and lost
than never to have loved at all.*

When I held my book in my hand I recognized it was time to move forward, to go on. It was time to return home.

My immediate family tended to be secretive, especially when it came to things my mom and dad didn't want, first my brother and me and then my sister, to know, things that could be considered as scandals. An older female cousin got pregnant without being married, how in the world could that possibly happen? An uncle, my mom's brother got in some kind of serious trouble in the South and had to come live with us for a while, to sleep in the basement. We weren't supposed to know about the trouble part. If we learned of something we shouldn't have known it was because an older relative really didn't care we knew and told us or we somehow overheard the details.

Of course my having polio could not be hidden, or ignored. My mom and I dealt with the doctors and nurses and regular appointments and both

my parents attempted to negotiate the bureaucracy of the hospitals and related institutions from the time I was three and one half years old until I was seventeen and of course the effects were rather obvious even as they became less so as I grew older. But I realized specific details had really never been discussed in any in-depth manner. Much was vague and I had assumed many things and filled in blanks on my own.

I recalled, before I was twelve years old, going to buy snacks and candy at the corner store on our street and the owner Mr. Shelley (White) and I exchanging greetings and him commenting on how I was growing and how well it appeared I was doing and then he said something I had never forgotten. He said, “You were pretty sick there weren’t you? They didn’t think you were going to make it for a while but you did, didn’t you?” I thanked Mr. Shelley and replied that yes, I did make it.

Now I would find out more about that specific traumatic time and discover more about the secrets within me. In June of 1989 I took a week’s vacation and flew home to stay with my mom. I was nine months old when we moved into the family home and as I entered it, as always, memories rushed me as feelings and impressions as I looked at some of the furniture that was basically the same for at least twenty years, or more, in the case of the dining room set. The first color TV was still there and on top of it were high school graduation pictures of my brother and sister and myself. It was as if I was seeing much of this for the first time and yet it had only been a little over five years. And as I hugged my mom I realized I really didn’t know this woman who I held in my arms.

My mom was the fifth oldest of ten children, six girls and four boys, and when her mother died, when my mom was fourteen, this meant she was tasked with virtually raising (rearing) her younger brothers and sisters. Born in Belton, South Carolina she moved to Dayton, Ohio when she married my dad at twenty-five, who was the same age. There she worked in a factory during World War II while my dad was in the army. These were the few details she had revealed throughout the years or that we heard when the family visited my mom’s brother and sister in nearby Inkster, Michigan for holidays and gatherings where they drank alcohol and partied and talked of the good old days. My mom was a very light

drinker and it took very little for her to get under the influence.

My dad was the oldest of four children, three boys and a girl, and was also born in Belton. His family was in a better position financially and owned almost a dozen acres not including the four acres his brothers and sister's houses occupied on the family land. I never met either of my mom's parents and I only met my dad's parents once when we visited there when I was six years old. I have no idea exactly how, why or when he left home. I assumed it was when he married.

My mom and dad both finished high school but other than that I would never know of their childhood and early years in any other way other than superficially. However, I know they brought to their relationship with me what they had inherited from those who had come before them and that which they had experienced in reality. I also understand their experiences encompassed what could be considered normal and included what could also be identified as traumas. My dad could be considered a functional alcoholic.

I would come to understand later that what was somewhat unusual about them was that my brother was born when both my parents were thirty years of age, they were thirty-two when I was born and forty when my sister was born. The children I grew up with who were near the same age as my brother and me, and the neighborhood was filled with them, had parents who were ten years or more younger than my parents.

During my eight days there, my sister took me to my dad's house on four occasions and he and I watched baseball on the TV in the den and talked about various subjects, nothing heavy, just observations on the game and the weather and what he was doing with his free time. He had worked a security job after retiring from Ford and now that he wasn't doing that he basically just stayed around the house. He always kept a fairly new car and we also talked about cars and I would stare at him when he wasn't looking as I tried to visualize myself at his age, which was seventy-two, and I wondered how I would look if I reached that age and of course wondered if I would even live that long.

He had remarried soon after he and my mom divorced so I observed how he interacted with his wife. I noted how nice his house was and how

his wife had a house full of fairly new furniture. I mostly monitored how I felt to be in his presence. I reflected then, and later, on the family dynamic involving children who never knew, in reality a parent or both parents or lost one or both at a very young age. Then there was me. I knew my parents, but in actuality, didn't know them.

At my dad's house I saw the person who Doctor Freud had described as the mysterious, unknown father who represented the rules of both the family and society and civilization itself. The father was the law and the reinforcement of the internal 'no.' I felt a slight essence of unease and mild apprehension in his presence, which I recognized as derivatives of fear and remembered some of the times we clashed, or I attempted to reject his authority over me. I also wanted to bring balance to memories and realizations that I knew were one sided.

I found in the short time we spent together the family illness, that which was passed down to him through his parents and thus from him to me. I realized as adults we had only occasionally shook hands. I couldn't recall, there was no memory of him having ever warmly hugging me. I searched for some spontaneous embrace or greeting with a pat on the back. Had he ever touched me in that way? Of course, I would say, but I didn't (couldn't) remember a specific occasion when that had occurred. Had he ever said he was proud of me? Perhaps, each time I brought home just about all A's on my report card from elementary school but more significantly, perhaps not. Where were those moments when it was just him and me, together, alone and he told me something a father should, was duty bound to share with his son? Those moments, those things were there somewhere weren't they? Something to remember other than, something more than just how to bait a hook, how to search for night crawlers or how to cast a fishing line? Hadn't he instructed me how to wear my clothes, tilt my dress hat? Didn't he teach me, help me to learn how to ride my two-wheel bike? When it came to his advice about girls there was nothing to recall. But most important I felt, deep within, that he had never said, as something genuine, real, heartfelt and true that indeed, he did love me.

The distance, the aloofness, the attitude of, "I'm the man here in this family. I do and say and not do and not say what I want," was just the way

he was and that view of mine in regards to his attitude was unbalanced and was just a myth in my mind. My dad was personable, had friends and to my friends was cool the way he dressed and leaned slightly when he drove. He worked hard, full time and overtime at Ford's and sometimes a part time job on the side. He had, we had, one of the first color television sets on the block and our young friends came into the house to sit and watch it with us and even stood on the porch and looked through the windows to see the moving colors. We had bicycles and roller skates and ice skates and he took us skating in the winter at Belle Isle and we had marbles and bowling balls and he took us to our bowling league and to the YMCA, and we had an allowance to spend.

He gave me a 1959 Ford to drive when I turned sixteen and he bought a brand new Ford LTD for me to drive to my high school graduation and to the parties afterward. We never wanted for anything that we actually needed. We had food for nourishment and heat for warmth against the cold and stability when I needed it most and I had to accept I felt his strength, his presence within me along with everything else that existed there. He had done the best he could and the emotional gulf that existed between us, that was real and palpable, was a product of who we were, the times in which we lived and what we had gone through together.

I would have to determine, interpret as best I could if he had a positive approach to life, his attitudes, if he was kind, giving, compassionate, fearful, courageous or a liar and a cheat. I also had to accept my animosity towards him. It was as if I was upset with him and held something against him. Perhaps it was as simple as feeling he didn't protect me against sickness or as complicated as trying to understand if he had come between my mother and me. Was he the one who took her away from me when I was a child? Or, was it much more than that, much different from that or tied inextricably to that trauma?

I realized as I sat there and watched the Detroit Tigers on TV and ate corned beef with my dad that it would take years to work through our relationship and there would be new things I would eventually know and some things I would never know. But I decided that in his own way that he loved me as best he could and in my own way, however indistinct it was, I

loved him as best I could and if I continued to work at that which still remained before me I would come to appreciate and love him even more.

As I thought of all he had done for me and provided to me, the sacrifices he had made I was reminded that Doctor Freud had explained that children desire to be grown in order to achieve the strength and power and freedom they perceived adults to have. Adults seek to have what they actually long for internally, that they lacked in childhood, which was protection and love. He said this is why people of great means, who had acquired all the material items they sought, remained unhappy. He emphasized that material things, even as they can protect one against the dangers of reality, cannot provide love. He saw this in many of his patients who tended to be well off financially and yet were ill, from being mildly dissatisfied with their life to suffering to the point of being hopeless and unable to leave their home because of their neurosis (illness).

While at my mom's I had to first accept the signs, the gray hair, the slowing walk, that she was obviously growing older, was in fact a mortal human being entering her mid-seventies. I recognized I was affected by this and checked myself as I watched her move throughout the house, this house where she had lived alone, except when I was there, since she divorced my dad. I realized that when my sister and I had been in the grocery store I had waited patiently while an elderly woman (White) had moved before us and fumbled with her purse as she searched for money to pay the cashier and I had felt something kindly towards that evidence of aging. Yet, as my mom walked around the house or moved in front of me as we prepared dinner I felt a degree of impatience and her effort mildly irritated me. I had to question this about myself and knew I would have to question everything, not just while I was there, in her presence but also after I had departed.

It quickly came back to me that just as with my dad, I couldn't recall displays of affection from her towards me. There were few spontaneous smiles, no hugs when being greeted. I could remember that when I would first see her in the mornings as I prepared for school she would normally have an expression on her face that I now understood was indecipherable. It was as if I had done something untoward over the course of the night.

Was the look one of suspicion or indifference? She never asked me if I had slept well or how I was doing at any time of the day or night. Had she ever told me she loved me without me expressing it first? And when I did utter those words it was as if the sound of them to her and both the sound of her own voice as she was forced to reply, made her uncomfortable. But even more significant, the professing of my love to her sounded hollow in my mind and within me felt strange and deceptive.

Had she ever hugged me without me hugging her first? Even as I hugged her on this meeting, when I hugged her and gave her a kiss on the cheek and forehead she accepted the hug, there was a smile, but there was no hug returned. Of course my memories of her were unbalanced, or was it perhaps, or even more telling, perhaps not? Why was it so easy to hide the positive and remember the negative? What was the significance of that emotional reality?

My dad was unable to save money and my mom was unable to spend. What did that contrast mean? How had they become that way? How did that affect their children when conflicts over financial issues arose? Verbal conflicts that I could suddenly recall as I looked around the family home at the furniture that had remained the same for over thirty years and yet had watched baseball on dad's fairly new TV, relaxed on the comfortable, nearly new couch and sat on my dad's porch with him and talked about the new car that again sat in his driveway. Was my dad a spendthrift, and irresponsible? Was my mom tight and cheap? If so, what did that make me? How different yet similar my parents were. Both always there for their children yet seemingly missing sincere feelings of empathy not just for others but an inability to express their own feelings. They were both close to us, their children, yet distant from us at the same time.

During my visit with her I sought the balance that I knew existed. Balance in my feelings, positive and negative. Balance in my memories, pleasant and painful. What about the seemingly countless times we took the bus to the hospital to endure the long interminable boring minutes, sitting there quietly, together, the many hours waiting for my name to be called? Remember, my brother waiting for us at the corner of Warren Avenue with the little red wagon so he could pull me home the nearly

three blocks? I had forgotten. That childhood memory was one of perhaps millions that had been lost somewhere inside of me.

But others I did remember for some reason. There in the backyard grass we, together, mom and me, on our hands and knees, had searched for four-leaf clovers. How old was I? Where was my brother? How badly I wanted to find one for her, before she found one. There were the morning glories she and I had planted together, still returning annually after thirty years. There's the mint we had put into the ground, she and my brother and I, that withstood the harsh winters, to shrivel and fade yet somehow live on and grow in the spring and thrive and spread during the summer. Mint that I had gone, on this trip, to find, to smell when I rubbed it between my fingers the way she had shown me. Mint, I could taste under my tongue as she had instructed me to do.

What about the exercises? I would lie on the floor and she would hold my left leg as I lifted against her resistance. She would exercise my foot, bending, twisting, as the physical therapist had instructed us. She helped me stand on one leg and stoop and straighten to build strength as I held on to the dinning room table. She admonished me, encouraged me to try harder, to walk better as she moved backwards and I stepped forward as I held her hands in mine as if we danced, together.

But I knew I also wanted more than balance. I wanted to understand. Why did I feel the way I did in their presence? There was an indistinct dullness within my emotions for them. A numbness that existed in the presence of both my mom and dad seemed to outweigh the memories regardless of what they were or where they fell on the spectrum of positive and negative. A gulf existed between us, a rift, a void, and in that chasm was something that remained indescribable.

During my time back at home, on two occasions my brother and sister and I took my mom out to eat at a restaurant. It was like a special treat. On several occasions I prepared meals and along with my mom we made snacks and we would sit at the dinning room table and talk, just the two of us. As my visit drew closer to ending I began to turn the direction to people from the past and to old times. Finally I asked her about when I had gotten sick in 1952. I knew some of the details from having previously

being told but this time I asked the questions that would give me the answers I believed I needed. It was a causal conversation and she spoke in matter-of-fact tones, almost without emotion, her memory seemed clear and precise. But as she shared that crucial period in my life, (her life) she was telling me influential things that had happened specific to me that in my consciousness I did not remember.

She said three days after we had been to the park I told her my head was hurting and I was running a fever so I stayed in bed most of that day. The next morning she found me crying in the hallway and holding on to the doorknob and I said my leg was hurting and I couldn't walk. I still had a fever, my dad was at work so she and my uncle, her brother, took me to Children's Hospital.

The doctors examined me and said they thought I possibly had polio. They asked my mom some questions and from the information they gathered, just as I always suspected, they said I probably contracted it at the park. They said that they had to isolate me. I was put in quarantine and if I did have the disease, once the chance for me to infect someone else lessened I would be put in a unit with other children who also had polio. My mom left me in the hospital and went home.

My dad came back with my mom the next day and then each day after that my mom, alone, took the bus there but couldn't come into isolation because it was determined I definitely had polio. Over the next several days my fever worsened and I grew weaker, particularly in my leg. Then after another few days the fever went away and I was moved to a hospital in Farmington, Michigan, a little over twenty-five miles from Detroit. I was placed into the children's ward with other polio patients.

Both my mom and dad were allowed to visit me but I wouldn't eat except when my mom fed me. Each time they left I would cry so hard and so long that I began to weaken again and the doctors told them I wasn't doing well. For the next week, each time they came to see me, when it was time for them to go, my mom would distract me and my dad would leave the room and then a nurse would distract me and my mom would leave and the nurses told them when I realized they were gone I would have tantrums and cry myself into exhaustion. I grew so weak they thought I

would die. The doctors decided my mom and dad shouldn't visit until I got stronger and so they stopped coming.

I would stay in the hospitals from early June until right before Christmas and it wasn't until perhaps a week before I was scheduled to be discharged that I would see my mom and dad again. She said when I saw her that next time, I was sitting in my bed with picture books spread around me. When she came up to me (smiling?) I at first seemed to react as if I didn't recognize her. It was as if I didn't know who she was and she remembered I didn't cry. She also said when they got me home my dad set me down in the living room and I walked, in my brace, through the house and to her it seemed as if I was lost, and confused, as if I didn't recognize my surroundings, or realize where I was.

Within days they would find out that the books that had hung in a bag from my bed, that had been given to me to keep, to take home, that in those books I had colored many of the images and there were crude letters that I had printed with crayons, some letters that made words and words that I could point out and pronounce. Before I was four years old I had begun to read and write.

And as I sat there at that table and looked at my mom and listened to her words that told a story about the first, most crucial part of my life, I began to realize the strength and the significance of what was hidden deep inside of me, inside of my unconscious. I knew, the doctor had told me, yet even as I accepted it, I minimized it. I had wanted to ignore it. I had resisted it in order to underestimate its importance. I had covered it up, turned it into pain because it was more acceptable to feel hurt than to be angry. It was that thing that was coiled and heavy and indescribable and that I feared more than anything else, more than all the things from which I attempted to run from, to hide from, and to escape from. It was hatred. Repressed deep inside of me, living in that Dark Cauldron of my mind, of my being, was a powerful hatred and it had drenched, saturated, diffused over and into everyone and everything in my life to some degree, (quantity; quality) or another.

I hated my mom, my mother, (*the other*) this woman who gave me life. And I loved her, was supposed to love her, wanted desperately to love her,

needed to love her not just to at first survive, then, but in the here and now, in reality, in order to heal myself and bring a measure of peace to my existence. I understood there still remained so much work to do and that this internal conflict, this duality was another aspect of the foundation of my true illness.

Areas of Existence

All that I was, all that I am, all that I shall ever be, can be, as a human being will manifest in one form or another, to some degree or another as both quantity and quality across five areas of existence. First and foremost, by being born into this world and living in it and by dying and departing this world will be the reality of my existence in reality, which makes *reality* an area of existence.

If I sit on the bed in my bedroom where I slept and existed from the age of nine months until I moved from home, I can feel the bed beneath me. I can reach out and touch the walls. I can see and touch the wooden brown bird with silver metal wings that I made in shop in elementary school that still hangs on the wall. I can see and touch the four-piece wooden cat Mr. Womack, who lived one street over, helped me make that I cut out in his garage and sanded over and over until it was smooth and then stained black and attempted to varnish but bubbles would rise no matter how careful I was and so I sanded the varnish away and left the cat a dull black and hung it on the wall beside the bird and it still remained in that spot on my return home. These objects are real and thus exist in reality

If I step outside of the room and close the door I can no longer touch or see the bed or the desk or the walls or the those things I created that hang on the pink-colored walls. Yet they still exist because I can visualize those objects and even with or without closed eyes, see myself in that room, upon that bed or sitting at that desk. All that once existed in reality now exists solely in my *imagination*, which is the second area of my existence.

Then there is all that this bedroom means to me, whether I am within it or not, can visualize it or not, can touch its contents or not. This bedroom represents both ideas and qualities of my life. Here reside memories and feelings of solitude and secrets and qualities of restlessness, restfulness and disturbing nightmares and strange, yet perhaps lucid dreams. This bedroom represents the third, *symbolic* area of my existence.

I see through my eyes and in my mind the books on the desk stacked according to size and importance, the paper and pens in their designated

spots, the bed, neatly made, the pillows, waiting. The floor is swept clean, the clothes in the closet properly hung, the shoes arranged as they should be. There in the seemingly haphazard clutter is an order, which is my order. I have found a place for everything and everything has its own place. Each and every object is an indicator and everything is a symptom that represent the fourth, *symptomatic* area of my existence.

There is my human heart, weighing only ounces, able to be extracted and seen, held, touched. There is my human brain removed and examined, a mass of white and gray and yellowish tissue weighing just a few pounds reflecting in the light, black and red hues. See me? Touch me. Indeed, was that really me?

But what of my spirit that resided within my breath that lived, where? Did my spirit live inside my soul? My spirit infused my heart and brain with my singular essence. Only I could exist as me. No matter how much I longed to be someone else I could not be anyone else because everyone else existed in their own singular essence. My spirit was formulated from the memories of my experiences, experiences not necessarily unique yet my spirit was unique, as is each and every spirit.

Yet I have no recollection of those very critical first few years of my life, or do I? If I do where are they? Are those memories in my soul, which contains my spirit? Can I still feel the emotions that were created through the traumas I can no longer recall? Can lost thoughts that once, long ago represented real scenes and true, yet hidden distorted memories, still exert influences upon me that traverse all areas of my existence? I am, because I feel. I am emotional. And there I exist, in the fifth, *emotional* area of my existence.

Doctor Freud discovered within me an unconscious, to me an unknown and misunderstood realm of my brain that truly existed and that contained ideational representations of my instincts, sexual (aggressive) in nature. These ideas, thoughts, scenes and memories felt as something inimical to my life and were repressed into the *It* (Id) to thereafter press upwards in an attempt to live and to be expressed. I pressed down, to fight against, to keep all that threatened me, (the *I*; Ego) away.

He had advised me that the foundation of my illness (neurosis) was

formulated when as a child I had experienced (undergone) repeated object losses. He also said that the inseparable relationship between love and hate within me, among all the characteristics of my obessional illness was the most dominant. I had been stunned by what my mom had shared. And I was pained when I thought about that child who had been me.

What was the state of my three-year-old brain? That was what I had to begin to examine on my return to California. I had only been alive, in reality, a little over forty-one months and the nearly six months I spent in the hospital was a long lifetime within my then short lifetime. I went from walking and running to not being able to walk or run. I had just begun to understand the existence of others outside of myself and that not only could I feel but that others could also feel and thus was developing empathy and sympathy.

My three-year-old mind contained not just degrees and qualities and quantities of reality but also elements of pretend and fantasy and ghosts and witches and goblins and monsters and unknown entities in the potentially frightening and threatening darkness that could exist beneath my bed and in the closets and behind closed doors. My imagination was fertile and fresh and was being filled with all types of new information.

I was creating and laughing at nonsensical jokes and playing with imaginary friends and developing an idea of the passage of time and the difference between night and day. I could express myself verbally at a very basic level but was not prepared for what began to unfold and lasted, for me, what would have been a vague and indeterminable amount of minutes and hours and days. Thus I could not say with words what I wanted to say to my mom or needed to ask the strangers around me in this unfamiliar place in order to seek an understanding of the events that began to traumatize me, repeatedly.

I could not speak distinctly of confusion, uncertainty, bewilderment, separation, detachment, disconnection, abandonment, duplicity, deception, treachery, distress, dread, fear, fright, terror or torment. These descriptive words were not in my possession at that time. I couldn't tell them specifically how I was suffering or in any way share concisely with them that for me their activities were cruel and that they were torturing me.

I could not scream out the proper words or convey the concepts behind what I needed to say through my hysterical tears. All I had within me were my three and one-half-year-old pure and faultless emotions, those feelings and emotions that a child would feel. There were no such words as adoration, fondness, tenderness, endearment, affection. There were no derivatives for that which I felt for my mom, (mother) there was only a powerful love for the one (*other*) my very life had depended on to provide me food, the nourishment that would not only sustain me but allow me to thrive and grow physically.

It was an exclusive, absolute love for the one (*other*) who I required to hold me, to touch me, to provide me that which was more than food, and greater than physical nourishment, and that was the emotional support and comfort that would lift me and carry me through what I confronted and what challenged and assaulted me. I needed the strength of my mom's love to fill me so I would not dry up in my spirit from the withering of my soul.

Through no fault of her own she failed me. The circumstances and situation was out of her control and it would take me years not just to comprehend that but to understand and admit to the depth of my hatred for her because of that failing and to recognize the hatred was sick and made me ill because it was neurotic in that it was not based upon the reality of what happened or who she really was.

Of course I loved my mother. It was as if this is a requirement of my humanity that is passed to me through my ancestors and all that opposed that love I fought to keep away. I resisted and then repressed as best I could my sexual feelings and my aggressive feelings that revolved around those thoughts of her as I lay in my hospital bed in my isolation and loneliness and longed for not just her presence and her essence but her touch. All my instinctual trends, both positive and negative coalesced in the unchecked autoerotic activities in which I engaged while in that strange environment that was my new home.

Who were these people who were now controlling my world? Who were these women (White; Colored; Negro; Black; African American) dressed in white who now touched me in my nakedness as they bathed me

and who fed me and helped me and watched me go to the bathroom? Who are they who now cared for me and would come and go throughout the day and night and who I now dreamed about day and night? What is this I feel for them? What is this they're showing and expressing that they feel for me? What, or who is it I'm looking for, there at the door? What or who is it I'm listening for in the semi-darkness when I'm alone with just *myself* at night?

I would come to realize it was the feeling of hatred that dominated me, constructed me, constricted me. There was no dislike or muted hostility or slight animosity. There was no irritation or vexation or exasperation. I wasn't indignant or displeased or angry at my circumstances or the *one* I believed who caused them to occur. I was enraged, having been flooded with the fury of a child. Hatred was pure within me and yet it mutated and evolved into something else. There became for *the other* and then *the others* after that an initial attraction coupled with an aversion and incipient mistrust that flowed upwards from the foundation and it was strong and I tamped it down with an exaggerated, overly idealistic conditional love and I would live from that point forward with an unconscious foreboding of betrayal and travel through the world in the agonizing and tormenting throes of disbelief in females and doubt that carried behind it, imbedded within it, deep shame and guilt.

The shame and guilt rose and joined from two sources, feelings and activities. The feelings revolved around questions I could not ask and therefore remained unanswered. The feelings that were produced, under the circumstances, were natural. The autoerotic activities were also normal for a child my age and yet they were abnormal because there was no true constant opposing force from the presence of someone else. I was ultimately, for long periods of time, alone with only *myself*. And I was lonely for my mother (*the other*). The sexual activities I was subjected to by *others*, most likely unintentionally, were as traumas. Was I the cause of this that I was going through? What had I done, or thought, to deserve this? Was I being punished for not only my sexual transgressions but also for my thinking? I had created fantasies and scenes within my magical three-year-old mind as I suffered and struggled to place the events into

some order to make some sense of it all. I was linking a causal relationship between my thinking and my actions and the events that had unfolded. The scenes, in reality and in my imagination were misunderstood, they were abbreviated and truncated and they were obviously distorted. Yet the feelings attached to these ideas and stories were real and palpable and felt within my body acutely and the doctor described the feelings as my *I* (Ego) experiencing a strange and dangerous sense of being overwhelmed.

Acceptance and Transformation

In January of 1990, for my 41st birthday I drank alcohol. It was vodka and grapefruit, a drink called a greyhound. I bought a pint of vodka and a half-gallon of grapefruit and made it myself. It wasn't my favorite drink but I couldn't decide if I even had a favorite. I had more or less been through them all.

I had refrained from using alcohol and/or drugs for a little over three years. The good doctor had explained to me that my reading books to heal myself was like giving a starving man a restaurant menu. There was more work to be done, much more. More challenges awaited me but I believed I could effect change within *myself* and move away from the labels that I had placed upon *myself* and that had been placed upon me.

I remembered soon after I had gotten out of rehab I had stopped by Baby Ray's women's clothing store. He was in the back room with several other men including Chuck, and Fish, who had put me in the Audi. It was one in the afternoon and they were sitting around talking, and drinking from a half empty fifth of cognac. Those I knew were glad to see me and in the course of our conversation they all agreed there wasn't anything wrong with me. Baby Ray told me to ignore those White people, I wasn't an alcoholic or drug addict, I just needed a break. Fish concurred and said all I needed to do was back off for a while. They told me to go ahead, have a drink. I politely declined and soon extracted myself from what, in the program, was called a slippery situation with slippery people.

In the program taking a drink or using drugs after a period of sobriety would have made me a scout who had gone out to survey the substance abuse terrain and hopefully would make it back and bring with me a report, which usually was that, nothing had changed. Some would have looked down on me but mostly I would have been welcomed back with admonishments, advice, and opened arms and told it was all right that I had 'slipped,' I had to keep coming back and stay sober. But I hadn't 'slipped.' My drink was premeditated and calculated. I had reassessed my situation and decided to reject the terms alcoholic and addict. I would embrace a different 'ic and accept being a neurotic. Part of my reasoning

was that a person addicted to food wasn't told they could never have another sandwich.

I had crossed a line when I decided I needed to get sober so there was no going back over it, ever, that was impossible. Unless I could move into complete denial and thus think and feel differently about the substances and their powerful influences that nearly ruined my life I would always be wary of them. I knew the *I* (Ego) could not conquer alcohol or drugs but as a neurotic with the characteristics of a compulsive/obsessive could I, across all areas of my existence, become less neurotic and have less of a need for altering substances?

The process of recognizing, claiming and accepting I was dealing with a specific illness with a label of my own choosing, was in fact crossing another line. Before I ever considered using drugs again I was able to realize that alcohol was no longer the same for me because in small increments, I was no longer the same. A little over a year after I went into rehab and was well into my self-analysis I realized I wasn't waking up with a still occasional, vague sense of thirst. It was a dryness that when I was drinking regularly I knew that sometime during that day, or night, I would have a drink to quench that thirst and soothe that need. I realized that constant state of seemingly dehydration was connected to the unease I carried through life, a life I came to understand contained high quantities and qualities of anxiety.

The challenge was to confront head up, without being in an altered state, all that I came to and that came to me and to be able to tolerate the discomfort (pain) those confrontations produced. I now knew the pain was psychological and emotional in nature. I thought about the specific time in the hospital when my foot and ankle had been cut open and stitched closed. I lay in bed late one night and rang my buzzer. When the nurse (Colored; Negro; Black; African American) came I requested medicine for my pain. She explained something to me in a way I would never forget as long as I retained the ability to remember it and I would draw on what she told me from 1990 on.

She stood beside my bed in the semi-darkness and spoke softly to me and it seemed as if she whispered, perhaps not to waken my roommates.

She said if I concentrated on the pain I would realize it came in waves and throbs and beats and that between the waves and throbbing and beating there was no pain and I could only feel the pain at the instant I felt it and that it was not constant and that I could focus, not when the pain was there but when it was gone and that at the instant it was gone I would no longer remember it. She said I could get through this without the medicine and that I would be okay. Then she said she could get me the medicine but she would have to put that on my chart that hung there at the foot of my bed and in the morning the doctor would read my chart and I wouldn't be able to leave the hospital when I was scheduled to leave. I wouldn't be able to go home. She asked me if I wanted to go home and I told her yes and then she asked if I still wanted the pain medicine and I thought about what she had said and I thought about the pain as I felt it and didn't feel it and I told her no, I didn't need it.

The good doctor told me I had been dealing with life as if I were a child and still possessed the infantile *I* (Ego) of a child. He said I was in fact stronger than that now and if I continued to work through my personal issues I could become even stronger. As I mined through the *It* (Id) I should (could) allow that which was repressed into my unconscious to express itself and the *I* (Ego) could (should) make a conscious decision as to the validity of the emotions I felt and determine if they were based on reality. Once the repressed was brought up the *I* (Ego) could (should) extract the energy that was contained in that complex battle and bring that energy into my *I* (Ego) and utilize that freed up energy to deal with life.

By the spring of 1990 I was researching my second book and had begun writing it by late summer. I did research at work when I found time and did my writing at home. I didn't (wouldn't; couldn't) drink and write. It was counterproductive and interfered with my progress. On several occasions I had tried but under the influence I no longer felt a rush of elation on an infusion of courage. I only felt sluggish and tired and of course I had to deal with the thoughts that went along with doing something I knew I shouldn't be doing.

I remembered Kat, the 'working' girl from 12th Street who would run off from her pimp and spend some time with me in my little apartment on

the east side of Detroit. Our experience together reminded me that the task was more than to know myself. She had said, "People respect people who can say no!" So I also had to 'no myself.'

I kept a calendar and marked in red the days I drank alcohol. Weeks would pass without a mark and some weeks had two or three marks. I refused to drink two days in a row. I refused to drink and drive and whereas I once would drink to go out now I couldn't go out if I drank. I knew I had been fortunate (lucky) in that I had never been busted for driving under the influence and in fact had never been arrested, never been to jail, although I had on two occasions been searched by the police with drugs in my sock. I was a cat with nine lives and I didn't know how many I had used (wasted), five or perhaps eight. Bars and clubs held no attraction. Cocaine still remained out of the question. I discovered that my life was okay without the substances that had been with me, in some form or another, to some degree or another, in some quantity or another since I was thirteen years old. I was all right with being okay.

I accepted my sexual abstinence as natural for me. Sexual situations made me uncomfortable and had always created emotional chaos within me. I realized I had never been told that the true purpose of sexual intercourse was for the production of offspring and what I had sought in the act was unattainable and was a perversion of that purpose. But what was it I wanted and what did the young women and older women I had been with want? I would never know what they really sought from me and through me.

I had a lady friend tell me one time, as we lay recovering in her bed naked beside each other, that after the sexual act a person should be as she was at that moment, at peace. It sounded fine. At least it gave me a purpose, to create peace in the *other*. But once I had passed the naïve youthful experimental stage of sexual activity and had matured, that had always been my purpose, and why I had developed elaborate, exotic and perverse means and methods to somehow satisfy the female I was with as if that would somehow validate me and lift me past the sense of discomfort I had always felt in my nakedness as I waited for the questions. There was the benign, "What happened to your leg?" There was, "How

did you get those scars?" There was the most shameful and painful of all, "What's *wrong* with your leg?"

There was something significant for me in attempting to be okay. For me it seemed to represent my true purpose and provide an opportunity to reduce the inner turmoil and to offer a chance for me to claim my own sense of peace in reality and in my soul. And as I moved towards acceptance, again, both in the reality of my life and the true essence of my spirit, which resided in my soul, my life began to transform.

I accepted that at one time the simple act of placing my feet upon the floor after awakening to begin my day or of rising to my feet and walking across a room had been fraught with levels of stress and degrees of anxiety. The natural act was unnatural, something to be thought about, contemplated, planned so as to not be seen as different or *wrong*.

I accepted I had been able to not see myself naked in a full-length mirror, at least not the whole physical aspect of my being. At times I could choose to see myself from the waist up or only the waist down. I could walk past the full windows of stores and ignore the fine expensive clothes and nice expensive shoes I wore and only see that which I concentrated on, lifting my foot properly, swinging my arms and establishing the rhythm of my gait. This is what my physical therapist had taught me from a young age. Wasn't it all to hide what was *wrong* with me and to keep the prying, wondering, judging eyes off of me?

I accepted that I chose women and allowed women to choose me who I would either leave or force them to leave me. There were only a few who I truly cared about and the way I felt about them was never the way I wanted it to be, thought it could be, hoped it would eventually become. There was always the doubt so never did I believe, not really, those who said they loved me. My ex-wife had been right when during an argument I accused her or not ever really loving me and she said of course she loved me and she added that I just didn't believe I could be loved. The essence of that truth rushed through me and I never forgot her words.

I accepted how powerful my sense of unconscious inferiority was and how that reality of my personality influenced my life. I was driven to lift myself up in the eyes of others and thus my own eyes by more than the

clothes I wore and cars I drove. I wanted to be looked up to, not down on. I wanted to be as the revered role models I was exposed to. At one time or another in my youth I wanted to be a pimp, a player, a mack, a hustler and a participant in the 'game.' But all of those gamers and their women came to who I ultimately strove to be and that was the dope man.

I sold drugs to not just those in the dark world but also to lawyers and doctors and policemen and firemen, teachers, professional ballplayers, and politicians. Who didn't visit the dope man or dope woman? Through the power of the substances they peddled, the dope dealers would always be on top. For brief periods of times I believed I was the man. I wanted others to believe that too and that I was able to handle my business. I didn't want anyone to know that inside I was ill.

I accepted I had to glean from the direction I took why I didn't look at the examples or follow the advice of the teachers, (White; Negro; Colored; Black; African American) especially in elementary school, and the doctors and nurses who cared for me, believed in my potential and encouraged me to succeed. There were several professors in college I impressed and of course there were young women on their way to successful professional careers who were attracted to me. That wasn't my preferred direction and the young ladies weren't my style. One day I hoped to understand why that was.

Doctor Freud, in addition, explained that I would discover I had within my unconscious a strong need for punishment and that the desire to be punished acted as a piece of my conscience and that I also had a powerful unconscious sense of guilt. Providing dangerous, potentially addictive drugs to people crossed into both of those areas and was clearly illustrated in the agonizing thoughts I sometimes had about how my activities were not just illegal but unethical and immoral.

To some people I was loyal, trustworthy, dependable, honorable and responsible. But I accepted throughout my life I had told lies, so I was a liar. I had stolen, so I was a thief. I had cheated and so I was a cheat. There was nothing I could do about that and only by refraining, as much as possible, from doing those things again would I remain on the path of transformation.

I accepted I had not even begun to explore my relationship with my dad (father) and brother and sister and friends and that as I moved through life every person I met, every place I went, each and every thing I thought and felt could (would) be open for interpretation by me. I remembered how my co-worker, Olivier, said his father once asked him, as he was in the midst of therapy with his psychoanalyst, why he wanted to learn how to read people's minds? We both agreed it was only our own minds we wanted to know, thoroughly.

I accepted that alcohol and drugs were destroying me and that alcohol and drugs, at one time, assisted me and made me feel okay. Wasn't that what I wanted, not to love myself, not to hate myself, but to be okay with myself? Wasn't that what I desperately wanted, when I was alone as a child in the hospital? Wasn't that what I wanted when I awoke on those three instances after the operations and was pulled from the deep darkness of anesthetic sleep, a state of existence induced by a substance created to make me insensitive to pain? Didn't I want to be told by my silent mom (mother) standing there beside the bed, the nurse, the doctor, someone, anyone, to tell me everything had gone well and I was going to be okay?

It would take almost forty years for me to even begin to accept the way I walked with or without my brace, to accept the way I looked, the way I appeared to the world, appeared to *myself*, as I understood in my mind and through my spirit that I would not allow myself to be defined or define myself by my height or weight or my pretty brown eyes or the shape of my nose or my sexy lips or a blemish on my chin or a bump on my cheek or the color of my skin or my beautiful clear complexion or the size of my penis (dick; pipe; rod; johnson).

Finally, I accepted that my physical handicap was a factor in my illness but not the main factor. It was the separation from my mom (mother). Those repeated separations were the crucial traumas that had placed gashes in my soul. I was severely wounded each time she left me and the experiences in the hospital coupled with the effects of polio slashed me and the deep cuts would never fully heal and the scars would never disappear completely. No, the emotional and psychological remnants of that time would remain within me until the end of my life, I accepted that,

just as I finally accepted that the shape of my leg would never change. I filled those long incisions with substances that numbed me and soothed me and emboldened me and protected me and brought chaos and harm and pain to not just myself but also to others. But life still stretched before me and life can be both handsome and beautiful and more powerful than my disbelief was my belief that whatever life held for me it would be okay, everything had the potential, in the future, to be all right.

On the Shedding of Tears

By winter of 1992 my second book had been completed and published and I could hold it in my hand. *Two Seven Zero (270)* was my 514 page opus. I needed to be in an area of the country where I felt I could expose it to as many people as possible, in the South and the East. I was ready to leave California to make that happen.

The year after I had gotten out of rehab I had gone on two vacations. My brother had been going to Acapulco, Mexico for two weeks in the summer for eight years so in June of 1987 I joined him there for four days. I also, for the first time, went to our family reunion that had been held annually for several years. This one was in Washington, D.C. in August and there I joined my sister and mom and uncle Nelson the youngest of the ten in my mom's family who had all flown in from Detroit.

At that reunion I met relatives and first cousins I had never seen before. Four of my mom's sisters had come there with their children including my mom's youngest sister who lived in the D.C. area, as did two of her three children. The youngest boy, Nelson, named after my uncle, was two years younger than me and we hit it off and found we had a lot in common. He was there from North Carolina, in the Winston-Salem area.

Nelson and I had stayed in touch and in 1990 I had driven from California to Georgia and then to Tobaccoville which was a little village just outside of Winston-Salem and where Nelson and his wife lived. I stayed with them for two days and that was when I first started to think about that area as a place to live. So, not only was I ready to promote my book I had also grown disenchanted with Los Angeles. Mainly, the traffic was horrendous and for me the gridlock and jams, the endless waiting seemed like such a waste of time and therefore, life. I had seen the changes since 1972, including the rising cost of living, the suffocating smog, the mass of people, the density of buildings and the list continued to grow as to why I should leave the land of sunshine.

I looked at a return to the Atlanta area but had seen on that 1990 trip how much that city had grown and changed. The traffic congestion would soon rival that of Los Angeles. I thought about Charlotte, North Carolina,

knowing it was also a growing city and the climate was similar to Georgia and somewhat mild, but the Winston-Salem area would be the first place I moved where I initially knew more than one or two people and actually had relatives there. I decided that would be the best move for me.

In early spring of 1993 I started shipping my possessions to Nelson to store for me and then as summer approached I gave notice at National Medical Enterprises and began to sell all my furniture. Finally I got rid of my Audi and flew to Detroit. The plan was to stay there at my mom's a while, possibly throughout the summer and then continue on to North Carolina.

Within two weeks of my arrival I realized, and what I came to believe both my brother and sister suspected but were unable to accept was that my mom was struggling to take care of herself. By the end of summer I knew I couldn't leave her in that situation. I would have to stay until her medical condition was clarified and a decision was made by her children as to what to do. I had to change my plans.

I signed up with a job placement service and got a position as a contractor in Southfield, Michigan, in the IT department at Ameritech, which was the phone company. I worked nights, from 11 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. in the operations area. I used a software-scheduling package to monitor and run tasks. Initially I was able to drive my sister's car to and from work for several weeks and then I started renting an older used car from a 'rent a wreck' company.

I pursued a second job through the placement company and they found me an afternoon position with a company affiliated with J. D. Power that was located in Taylor, Michigan. It was a physical job in the operations area where I just walked and mounted tape cartridges so automotive information could be processed. Both jobs were close to twenty minutes from my mom's house, in different directions. I had decided to work eighty hours a week for as long as I could.

I still tracked my alcohol use on a calendar. I drank on occasions and on occasions wanted to drink more but I barely had time to get any sleep as once again I sought rest in the coal bin in the basement. Drugs were not an option. None of my old friends (acquaintances; cohorts) knew I was

back and I wanted it to stay that way. I didn't know who was around that still had a grudge against me or who might think I still had a grudge against them. Perhaps there were still scores to be settled so I didn't go anywhere, I just worked and tried to deal with my mom, as best I could.

I was discovering that my family was dealing with an all too common situation, in conflict as to how to care for an aging parent. My brother and sister and I couldn't agree on the state of her altered physical and mental condition or what to do about now or the future. I kept reminding them I was only there temporarily and so something had to be done.

During much of January 1994 I went through record breaking cold temperatures. It was down to fourteen degrees below zero for almost a week and I went to work in it. When the temperature went to five above it felt like spring. I made sure mom stayed dressed warmly as she shuffled through the house and watched TV in the living room, sometimes standing in front of it for long periods of time. I swept the porch and shoveled the snow. I mopped the floor and vacuumed the rugs and washed the dishes and tried to make sure there were none dirty in the sink, at least not for very long. I cooked for both of us and tried to ensure she ate what I placed before her but to me it looked like she was still losing weight.

As the weather broke and winter was ending I quit the afternoon job, in part so I could be around the house more and also because I was tired of working two jobs. Then, one night as I prepared for my job at the phone company I was in the kitchen setting out some food and telling mom about the fruit in the refrigerator when she began to talk but I didn't understand the conversation and as she moved to stand beside me at the counter I looked around and then looked in the direction to where she was staring and I realized she was talking to the man on the Quaker Oats box, asking him questions. He was alive to her and he was obviously replying to her and answering the questions she posed to him.

I told my sister what had happened and a few days later we took her to the hospital. I sat outside in the waiting area while my sister went with mom for a check up and examination. Before the end of the next week my sister told me mom had been diagnosed with early onset dementia.

As summer approached I could see that her condition was deteriorating

because I was there. My brother visited on occasions, bringing prepared meals and vegetables each time and he would sit and talk to her for a while and even with my sister living upstairs she was only coming down three or four days a week and only for short periods of time. To them and to her younger sister who came over, maybe once every two weeks she appeared as if her decline would only be gradual and they saw little of what I saw.

One night I got up to prepare for work and when I came upstairs the house was filled with gas. Mom had tried to cook and had not turned the stove on properly. I opened the doors to clear the air and before I left for the night I took the knobs off of the stove. A few days later, when I got up for work I could smell gas again. She had taken some pliers and turned on two isles on the stove again. I pulled the stove from the wall and turned it around and pushed it forward, set out her food and went to work.

Soon after that I came home one morning and she had removed just about all the food from the refrigerator and some from the cupboard and set the dinning room table. When I asked her why she had done that she pointed to show me Mayor Coleman Young, Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks sitting there eating with the fine silver utensils she had placed before the guests. Then I saw a newspaper on the table with a picture of the mayor and his name in large letters. I had to take food to the basement refrigerator and put a chain around it and lock it. I cooked our meals standing beside the stove with it facing the wall.

She began to see strange things and imagined there were people throughout the house. She saw an old family friend who had been dead for years standing in the hallway. She left a dresser drawer open so that the baby who was lying in it wrapped in a blanket could breathe. We took her back to the hospital and they ran tests and did imaging on her body and brain. The doctors believed she had quite possibly experienced several mini-strokes that had affected her and this time they said that because of the presence of visual hallucinations and delusions and with her having problems interpreting visual information, the type of dementia was most likely LBD, which stood for Lewy body dementia.

I had to keep the doors locked so she didn't leave, wonder off and get

lost. She would go through periods of times where she kept asking and then demanding to go home. She had a plastic grocery bag packed with several of her possessions and so when my explaining to her that she was already home did not calm her I would take her and her bag and we would get in the car and ride around. Sometimes I would take her to Belle Isle and help her out of the car and we would walk awhile and look at the geese in the water and when I took her back to the house she would say, as I assisted her up the stairs, how glad she was to be back home.

Once I was packing to take a three-day trip to Charlotte. I had taken a day off of work to attend a weekend book festival and as I put my things in the suitcase mom had walked back to stand in the doorway and watch me. She asked if I was leaving and the way she asked, the sound of her voice made me look at her and as she stood there a warm knot formed in my chest and I told her that yes I was leaving but I would only be gone a few days and that I would be back. She said this time when I left not to take any more of her clothes. She said every time I walked out of the door I was stealing her clothes and I should be ashamed of myself. Her accusations caused anger to flare up and replace the sorrow that was just there.

I was being buffeted by these wild swings of emotions. Pain and fear and love and hate continually surged within me. I felt pity for her and yet I felt anger towards her when she would open the door to the basement and holler down for me to stop doing the things I was doing to the women I had down there. She accused me of horrible acts and then I would hear the floor above me creaking as she went back to pacing from room to room as if searching for something, or someone.

I knew she didn't ask for this illness to come to her as it did. She certainly didn't want it. I knew she was sick and the things she did and couldn't do and the things she said or didn't say were a product of that illness and although I understood what I was going through inside, it was still difficult to accept. So my feelings were continuously being battered between extremes and I attempted to filter them through the powerful love and hate I possessed for this now frail woman who was still my mom (mother), had at one time been, but in a very real sense, was no more.

I began to understand how a person attempted to draw comfort from the presence of another when going through a difficult situation that imposed itself across all areas of their existence. It was why people watched horror movies with someone, so the fear, by being shared would be lessened or at least more tolerable. It was why people wanted someone there, someone they cared about and that cared about them as a loved one was dying or had died so that they could hug someone or someone could (would) hug them and thereby absorb some of the pain that existed, in reality. I re-read the story (poem) in my book *Thru the Fire* that I had written in 1988 titled, *Someone*.

I wanted someone, anyone, to be with me, to see what I saw, to hear what I heard, to feel some part of what I felt at that moment. There was no one with me in that basement to share this with. Still I realized even if the house were full, no one could feel what I was going through, no one else could feel what my mom was going through. She and I were each individuals, unique in our singular essence and yet always and forever joined in our relationship of son to mom (mother), and mom (mother) to son. I tried to draw solace in that she was not in physical pain, she was more or less oblivious to much of what occurred. We were both there but separated. We were both alone in this, together.

As summer was drawing to a close I knew I would be leaving soon, I just needed to decide when and how. My contract with the phone company was expiring and my supervisor, (female; Black; African American) who by then knew she could count on me, told me she would recommend that my contract be extended for at least another six months. That would entail another young man (White) who I worked closely with being let go. Carl was good at what we did and he had a wife and two kids. I thought about my situation and his situation and in a private conversation explained to my supervisor that she should keep Carl because I didn't plan on being there through that six months period.

I began writing the short story *Shadows and Light (A Loving Phantasy)* that was based on what my mom and I were going through but at that time I believed no one could (would) ever know how much truth and reality and pain and hope was in the terrible, fantastical details.

She had usually called me by my nickname. My first name is Alvin, Vincent is my middle name and she normally called me Al and when I would come upstairs from working on our story, to prepare for work, she had begun asking me where Al was, adding that she couldn't find him, that he was gone. I would patiently explain that I was Al, that I had grown up and she would look at me with a bewildered, confused look and then say no, she meant little Al and she would hold her hand out to indicate the height of a child. Only on occasions did she know who I was.

As I wrote about what existed in the shadows of my mom's and my life and what I wanted to be revealed in the light, on several occasions, I fought against the tears that attempted to rise up and spill out but I managed, with great effort, to keep them away, to push them back down. I knew she was slipping further and further from me as she was losing her grip on conscious life and I was being twisted and was tumbling away from her and so I found myself, seemingly much too often, on the verge of crying. I didn't want to cry. First I had learned, at an early age that, that was something only little boys who hoped to one day be men did and men didn't cry so I struggle against my tears. But I sensed there was more to it than some principle.

I remembered 1963 when I was fourteen years old and lying on the living room floor reading the newspaper about a church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama. I had looked at, stared at the pictures of the four young girls (Colored; Negro; Black; African American) who were killed. Three of the girls were the same age as me and one was eleven years old and looked as perhaps my six-year-old sister would appear five years in the future. I had gone to my room, closed the door and flung myself on my bed and started to quietly cry and I couldn't (wouldn't) stop when I wanted to and I had to stay in my room so no one could see me.

I remembered when I was sitting in the room at the counseling center at the hospital with my then wife and had begun to cry and struggled to stop and then two days later I was at Spyder's apartment in the complex where we all lived and I opened his refrigerator to get a beer and I felt the cold air on my face and I flashed, in my mind, back to when my family had no refrigerator and how we had lived out of a cooler and I felt tears, that had

inexplicably remained close to the surface, begin to quickly rise and I almost burst out crying and I knew I had to push them back down, stop them and somehow regain control so they would never appear and no longer remain so near, to be so easily expressed.

So now, in 1994 I began to reach a new understanding in the battle against my tears and why I fought so hard not to shed them although a part of me wanted to. For so long, on occasions, when I became aware of someone, a stranger to me yet no matter the color of their skin or their ethnicity they were still connected to me through their being human and by some inhumane horrific act they lost, I believed unjustly, that which is most precious and that is their life, I wanted to cry.

For too long, each time I exposed *myself* to a murder or some brutality inflicted upon a child, a stranger to me yet an essence of me, I was not only hurt but grew beyond angry and I was not only in pain but enraged and I had always watched and listened and now I wanted to raise my voice, call out to the adults who snatched at a child in the grocery store or yelled at a child as they walked together on the sidewalk, "Stop it!" Stop it!" I wanted to say aloud what I was thinking and feeling. I pushed it all down because I couldn't cry for all those who came before me or my contemporaries who suffered and died as I was living or those who had yet to arrive on this earth.

What of those I met in the hospital while the three of us recovered from our operations, the young friendly boy (White) in the bed on my left and the young friendly boy (Colored; Negro; Black; African American) on my right? I remembered them, how we talked about the future. The little White boy wanted to run and jump and play baseball again. The little Black boy wanted to go back to school and he bragged about having two girlfriends. We all wanted to get out of our beds and into a wheelchair and rising from the wheelchairs we would be able to move through the hallways on our crutches to the playroom. Then the White boy got sick and was suddenly gone and the nurses came and helped the young Black boy from his bed and for the first time I saw his two polio deformed legs and how he struggled and I knew he would never walk as I now wanted to walk again with only my one brace. No, although I wanted to, I didn't

(couldn't) cry then for those two young boys and there in the basement I didn't (couldn't) cry for my mom (mother) or myself and I believed I knew why.

My tears, and all that exists within, behind and beneath them, terrify me. As they begin to form deep inside me I experience each and every one as a force and they feel as something heavy and sharp and the weight of the heaviness is more than extreme it's unfathomable and the edges of the sharpness is indecipherable and yet in some incomprehensible manner I believe each tear, if it is allowed to fall will give rise to ten tears and each of those ten brings forth one hundred and ten and that thing I feel inside me will begin to come up from my fiery soul and coalesce below my churning stomach and push up to my heated, heaving chest and rush into my constricted burning throat and settle behind my wide and shuttered eyes and flowing molten tears will freely fall without hesitation, without restriction, without limit and I'll cry myself, not to sleep as I did as a child in the hospital, but to death, as a man.

It wasn't simply the tears I feared or the pain associated with those tears, pain I can tolerate, and with pain there may very well be tears. It was the combination of pain and rage my tears represented. It was what the doctor had described as my (*I*; Ego) fear of being overwhelmed. I sensed being engulfed and then shattered, destroyed by my own feelings and those feelings could only be brought into reality by my tears and as long as I held them back and kept them down they would only exist in my imagination. Refusing to cry was an obvious symptom of my personality and symbolized the closeness of the deadly moments of my childhood.

So, in 1963 there was pain, tremendous pain, and crushing, pent-up, repressed rage and helplessness that threatened to overload me. There was nothing I could do about those murdered young girls in Alabama except imagine I could somehow in some way murder those who murdered them. Destroy them! Wish them dead, a horrible death!

As I sat there in that suffocating room with my wife and that strange male doctor, I cried, and regardless of the impetus for those tears they would take me back to the repetitious, original traumas there in the hospital when I was three and one-half-years old and where I not just cried

like the baby I was but sobbed hysterically, wailed uncontrollably, screamed and shrieked from the depths of my emerging soul as those around me tried to soothe me as they urged me to stop.

So as an adult what I avoided most was the fear and rage that had coupled itself to my tears. Powerful, overwhelming feelings that were established in the distance behind me yet were in fact timeless and still existed as palpable, distorted, and exaggerated elements of alarm and agitation, dismay, distress, irritation, and anger. But fear and rage was at the bottom and was the base of the foundation that had been constructed and fused into my dawning imagination and expressed to me in 1952 as something I felt however did not, could not know, sensed but could not touch but was experiencing in my weakening reality that what was happening to me was that I was about to die.

By September of 1994 it was time for me to leave. I had rationalized and justified my departure by telling myself mom would not receive the care she required as long as I was there. I believed long-term care was needed and had to somehow be established to assist her as her mental and physical condition worsened. I was torn by my decision, but then again, I wasn't. I was also resigned by the reality of that which I knew to be inevitable.

We sat at the dining room table that evening as it grew dark outside and shared what I knew would be our last meal together. We talked a little, about nothing, and I urged her to finish the food I had prepared. She still had somewhat lucid moments but mostly silence passed between us. I could look across the table at her and then look to my right and see on the bureau a picture of her in her twenties, before I existed, when she had long dark hair and large expressive eyes that were bright and seemed to sparkle.

I would always, for the remainder of my life strive to come to terms with our relationship, but at this time I just wanted to say some things to her, whether she heard or understood, or not. We had been through so much together and we had been through this together also, this leaving one another, over and over. It seemed as if on so many occasions one of us was going, or coming.

So after I washed the dishes I pulled up a chair and sat down beside

her. I explained as best I could what was about to happen, why I would not be there the next day or the day after that. I spoke names to her. I told her that her daughter and her son and her sister would be looking after her. I put my left arm around her shoulder and pulled her close and gave her a kiss at her temple. I held her for several long moments and it was the strangest feeling that came from my thought that she probably didn't know who I was. A hot fisted knot rose into my chest. My eyes grew moist, as they do at this moment as I write these words. My voice caught as I moved emotionally, felt closer to the truth of the statements I said, nearly whispered. I told her I loved her and thanked her for all she had done for me and that I would miss her and I assured her she would be okay. She didn't look at me or acknowledge me in any way. She was silent.

Later that night I grabbed the duffel my brother had brought from Vietnam. It was full of all I would be taking at this time. It was heavy and as I dragged it to the front door I turned to look at my mom sitting in the large chair by the hallway. Her eyes were closed. I waited on the porch until my cab came and then went to the bus station. It would take almost seventeen hours for me to get to Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

My cousin Nelson picked me up from the bus station and as we went up the road to his house we passed a small home sitting back off of the road and he pointed it out. There was a man on the porch who looked like he was working on the front door. He said the owner had died recently and he knew the man who had bought it and it may be for rent. We found out it was for rent and a week later I met with the landlord. He walked my cousin and me through and talked about the work he had done, like putting in new carpets and what he needed to do to finish up. It was basically a small, one bedroom home with another room that could be used as a bedroom and another room that could be used as a den or office. It came with a stove and refrigerator and it had a fireplace in the living room that the owner, whose name was Charles but everyone called Cookie, had blocked off. It had oil heat and no air conditioning. I told him I was interested in renting and he said it was expensive and that the rent would be 500 a month. He couldn't know the last apartment I had in California was a small one bedroom for 600 a month. He did know I had just arrived

and had no job so I offered to not only pay the required first and last but also three months in advance and he accepted. I now would be living in Tobaccoville, North Carolina.

My cousin and his wife owned another home not far from where we lived that they planned on turning into a place to keep children before and after school. There was some furniture in it that belonged to a friend of his that was for sale so I bought a couch a love seat and a chair. Nelson had a bed in his basement they didn't use so I was given that also. With the towels and kitchen items I had shipped from California it didn't take long for me to have just about everything I needed to feel fairly comfortable in my new home in this new area. I planned on buying a guitar and amp.

I found out Charles not only owned the home I lived in but also another four homes in the vicinity that he rented out. He also once owned property that he had sold where homes had been built and he had bought property, built homes and then sold the homes himself. He was known for his many real estate transactions and being a miser.

He lived up the road from me and around the corner from Nelson and what became relevant to me was that he also bought and sold used cars. Sometimes the cars had been damaged in accidents and he would have them fixed up and then sell them. He had bought a car that hadn't been in an accident but he knew he could sell for a profit and I bought that car from him. It was a 1986 Blue Mist Metallic, Nissan Sentra, actually a nice little transportation car.

During that first month I had a lot to do and I had adjustments to make and I found myself drinking alcohol, mostly beer, more than *I* (Ego) wanted to. I recognized the *It* (Id) was pressing on me and the desire to consume alcohol came as a strong push. I drank some moonshine with relatives. I had even thought about getting some weed (pot; marijuana; grass) to smoke but I still needed to get a job and I possibly would be tested and I didn't want anything in my system. But I noticed that I had made a reservation, left the opportunity open to get high in the future.

I studied my thoughts and feelings in my moments of solitude in this strange new home in this strange new area of the country. I realized I was still struggling within that last time I had spent in Detroit. It was as if I

was attempting to recover from what had been a nightmare in the darkness that had intruded into the daytime and even six hundred miles away the dreamy reality continued to exist. When I was alone I thought about Detroit and my mom. I wrestled with the decisions I had made and chastised myself for not handling the situation better and doing more. Finally, I recognized the emotions of remorse, regret and guilt. I called them out, those elements of my existence and they began to ease. I understood that, based on who I was, I had done the best I could. Perhaps, in the future, I would be given another chance, called upon to do more, to be better. The desire to drink and use lessened and then dissipated.

The house I now lived in was in the middle of four acres of land. When I sat on the front porch I could barely see the house on my right which was almost two acres away and was separated from me by first, a large wide area of grass and then tall thick trees that both belonged to my property. The house on my left was over an acre away and was also separated from me by my trees and then a gravel driveway that led to the house that again, I could barely see.

Directly across from me was only land and a gated fence. The house that was there sat back so far I couldn't see it at all. The family, that I would eventually meet, that lived there owned three horses and they would come up to where I could see them to graze and sometimes hang their heads over the fence and watch the occasional car go by. Whenever it was needed I would drive up the road to my cousin's house and get his riding lawn mower and ride back down the side of the road to my house and cut the grass. Then I would ride back up the road put the lawnmower in the garage and come back home.

Near the end of October my brother called. He told me my sister had gotten our mom in-home care and that a woman (Black; African American) came every day, five days a week for six hours. She assisted mom in bathing and dressing. She brought prepared meals and sometimes her young daughter came along. She and my mom and on occasions all three of them would go out, to eat or to the mall or Belle Isle. He said her long unkempt hair had been cut and styled and that she seemed to be doing better and had even gained a little weight. Her mind was still going, but he

believed more slowly now. He added that he would go over to the house one weekend day each week and that our aunt, her sister would also go by when she could, weather permitting, and he finished by saying she was doing okay.

One afternoon in late October I sat on the back porch and looked at the trees that stretched out directly behind the property. To the left, behind the area that I kept cut was tall brush that went, I don't know how far. I was cooking ribs and chicken on the small grill I had bought and I could smell the meat from the charcoal and wood and I watched the smoke rise into the air, into the sky and drift away.

The days were still pleasant and the nights were growing chilly and the leaves had slowly begun to change from bright to dull colors. I looked at the area of dirt that had been turned over by those who lived here before me where they had planted their garden. My cousin had a garden and I would have a garden too. I wanted to plant tomatoes, different kinds of tomatoes. I *loved* tomatoes and I would plant squash and cucumbers. I *loved* cucumbers. Of course I had to plant different colored bell peppers and hot peppers. I *loved* hot peppers. Maybe I would plant some beans and peas like my cousin and his neighbors. Then I could do as he did when I first visited him and go out to the garden and pick food for dinner.

I would find a job but I was in no rush. I was fortunate (lucky) when it came to finding a place to live and a job. Right then I was content to just sit on the porch and watch the leaves turn a golden color as the altering sunlight illuminated them as it set behind the house.

I had seen several deer and two groundhogs and rabbits scampering through the grass. I had seen a skunk meander across the yard and at night I saw the glowing eyes of opossums as they slowly went to wherever they were going. I had also seen a couple of snakes and when I described them to my cousin he said they were most likely black snakes and that their bite would hurt but they weren't poisonous and that they ate rats and mice, among other things. I wondered if the animals would eat my vegetables, if maybe I could put up a fence? Sitting there on that porch I realized I was growing nearer to a place I wanted to be, moving closer to having peace in my life.

My mom passed away (died) on April 15, 1998. She was a little over a month away from her 81st birthday. I had seen my dad in 2002 at the senior citizen home where he by then stayed. My sister and brother and I had gone to visit him together. His mind was still sharp and the three of us, with our voices raised against his failing hearing, laughed and talked with him of old times. I thanked him, for the three of us, for taking good care of us and I touched his shoulder and with my hand smoothed his thinning hair down and then gave him a kiss on his forehead. I told him I loved him. He passed away (died) on April 20, 2004. He was 87 years old.

I went home for the funerals. And as I looked down at the woman in the casket who had given birth to me and loved me and cared for me and protected me as she knew how, I touched the little stuffed animal my sister had placed into her arm and then I laid my hand on her shoulder and spoke to her, as if she could hear me.

“Bye Momma,” I said.

And when the casket was being closed on the man who helped give me life and who had loved me and cared for me and protected me as best he could, I called out aloud, as if he could hear me, so everyone in the room could hear, so I could hear the sound of my own voice.

“Bye Daddy,” I said.

But from me there was no shedding of tears.

The Colors of the Spirit

Before I was born my soul was dark, empty and static. There was no light, no substance, no movement. When I was born I was introduced into the radiance of life. The doctor performed a now nearly obsolete act and slapped me, shocked me and caused pain and thus color was injected into my soul and my spirit began to form. The color that was violently forced into my essence was the primary color, Red.

The soothing presence of the other, (mom; mother; nurse) that quieted my cries and provided nourishment added the primary color of Yellow to my soul and my now activated and expanding spirit became Red and Yellow and the secondary color of Orange was now imbedded within me.

Between the colors Red and Yellow, as the minutes, hours and days passed, the primary color Blue grew within me and wavered between Red and Yellow, the strength of the former, the need of the latter. These colored particles of my electrified soul were slowly, inexorably constructed by my emotions. My unique spirit, housed within my unique soul is the sum total of my feelings which were being created through all that I was experiencing both in reality and in my nascent imagination.

Hatred is Hate. Hatred (Pain) is the color Red and all that rises up, expands from hatred and that is connected to, is related in quantities and qualities and degrees are derivatives of hatred. Just a few are loathing; detestation; dislike; distaste; abhorrence; abomination; aversion; hostility; enmity; animosity; revulsion; disgust; contempt; antipathy; resentment; repugnance; denigration. To hate is to neglect; to abandon; to forsake; to despise; to deplore; to shame; to humiliate; to disgrace. Elements of hatred are elements of Hate, intended or not. They are Red and therefore color thoughts and feelings with hatred and inflame the spirit.

Hatred is pure Red and thus all emotions that contain hues of Red are related to the primary Red, including, and certainly not limited to Orange. Red, and due to the motility of Blue, combine to create Purple. Blue moves to Yellow and creates Green. Red and Green make Brown. There are innumerable hues and shades and tones and tints can vary and merge and split off. They become the colors of violet and plum and lavender,

emerald green, jade and kelly. Brown can be beige or chestnut or chocolate and cocoa. Blue can be tiffany, or sapphire or some unnamed combination of both.

To be negative is to be not just pessimistic but also to be a defeatist; gloomy; cynical; fatalistic; critical; and carry through life colors that are harmful; adverse; damaging; detrimental and thus are bad and Red.

To be positive is to be full, optimistic; hopeful; confident; upbeat; approving; supportive; encouraging; cheerful; affirmative; helpful; certain; decisive, and real, attributes of colors that are Yellow. Love is good

Black has no color. Black only darkens. Black is death. Black contains the nothingness that existed before and will exist thereafter, forever. White has no color. White only dilutes and washes out. White adds nothing, contains nothing and thus is nothing.

There is only the importance of the primary color Yellow, which represents life. All that promotes life is connected to Love. Some of the derivatives of Love are affection; fondness; liking; warmth; tenderness; kindness; devotion; endearment; attachment; friendliness; adoration; compassion; care; concern; sympathy; gentleness; benevolence; generosity; amiability; geniality; affinity; amity; accord; cooperation; concord; loyalty; faithfulness; fidelity; commitment; dedication, and admiration. All have elements of Love, again, it's only a matter of quantities, the dept of the qualities and matter of degrees that make up the brightness or the dullness of the color.

The primary colors of Red and Blue and Yellow were permanently incorporated into my soul through, not just the process of being born, but also the essence of being human and inheriting that which made me human. Life not only animated my spirit but as if life is an artist, painted each and every particle that would reveal, not in silhouetted form, but in clear, vibrant colors who I truly was and presented, in reality, the dominant colors of my spirit.

I existed and evolved through my spirit as I aged, not just in the primary three colors, not only in the various shades and hues and tones but also through the turmoil of the erupting combinations of adjacent colors, complimentary colors, single split compliments, double split compliments,

colors balanced and unbalanced, warm and cool, colliding violently, traumatically within my soul.

My spirit was sometimes lost and confused, wondering and wandering in the neutral nothingness of black and white and falling, rising and stumbling around, in all directions painfully in the shadows of the dull, cloudy, and opaque grays.

In 1970 I was twenty-one-years old and living in my one bedroom apartment on the east side of Detroit. I ingested some windowpane LSD, some of the strongest I had ever had. I took a trip and went the furthest I had ever been. I saw, in the reality of that journey, particles filling the air throughout the rooms. The particles were like dust and were all different rainbow colors. The dust-like entities were vibrant, as if charged, as if alive and they were beautiful and I could move my hands through the air and stir up the colorful dust and it, and all it contained, would swirl and move and settle and hover until I swirled the particles again and as I walked through the rooms moving my arms as a symphony conductor they would part yet seemed to surround me and cover me as mist. The next day the revealing hallucination was gone but I believed the particles to still be there, I just could no longer see them, but I could imagine them.

I can't see my spirit but I can see its effect, in reality. I can't see my spirit but I can feel its existence, within me. It's always been there. It always will be there until the moment I pass away (die). Because it was always there I was never really alone. I first truly began watching for it and listening to it and feeling for it when I was three and one half years old and from there I developed the ability to not only see colors but to hear colors and feel colors also. I ignored what I saw and heard and felt.

It took me thirty-four years from that time to make a serious concerted effort to begin an attempt to alter my spirit, to stir it up with new ideas and uncover truths (and lies) that were concealed within me. I wanted sincerely for all that was Yellow and all the derivatives of Yellow and most important all the attributes contained within that color of Love to be given an opportunity to float up and out from the background and into the forefront of my soul and settle there and remain there, suspended in serenity.

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