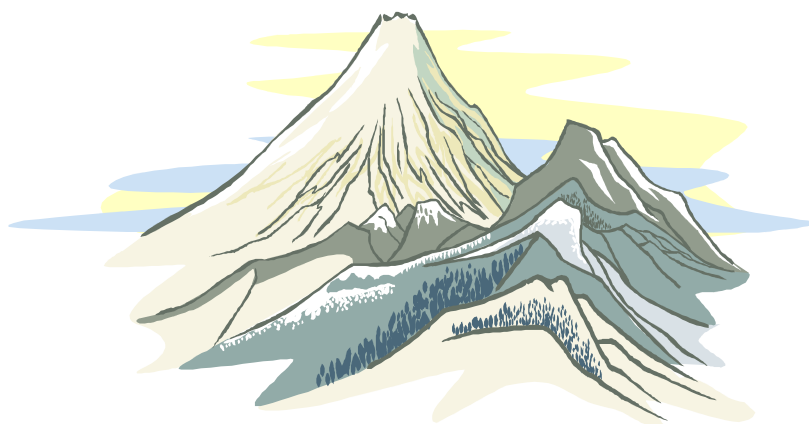


Big Sky



Hal Mayberry
2007

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Other books by H. T. Mayberry

One-ten-thousandth of the life and times of Harold Travis Mayberry - 2002

Lacy Moran and the twisting road – 2006

The Jones Girls - 1988

On a raw spring day in 1988 a dusty Ford with California plates brought the Jones girls to Redrock Montana and after driving slowly from one end of the town to the other they stopped at the Best Western Motel and rented a room. They told the clerk that they didn't know how long they would stay but they paid for three nights in advance.

Gail Johnson was used to seeing wanderers looking over the town. Most were young men just out of the Army or college or maybe jail but they all had the same look about them. She looked at the register and wondered where Anne and Rosemary Jones were coming from and where they were going. She doubted that Redrock would be their final destination.

After they had checked in at the motel they drove through town looking for a place for lunch. They passed over the Denny's and the fast food places and settled on Mom's Kitchen as the most likely spot to see what the locals were like. It was clean and tidy with a lunch counter and several tables and booths.

Seated in a corner booth they ordered the Lunch Special and watched the other's come and go. There were farmers and business men, clerks and housewives, boys and girls. They noticed that old army fatigues were popular dress for the younger men and blue jeans and flannel shirts were the dress of choice for most of the others. The waitress seemed to know everyone's name and there were some rude jokes that passed between her and her customers. A sheriff's deputy ordered sandwiches and a thermos of coffee to-go and the girls never saw any money change hands.

When Anne paid the check she asked the waitress if there was a real estate office in town and the girl told her that she was in luck,

"Hey Charley, are you open for business?" she shouted at a balding man who was eating alone in a back booth. He looked up with a smile and motioned the girls to join him.

"Hi I'm Charley Buckster" he said extending his hand.

"I'm Anne Jones and this is my sister Rosemary. We might be interested in some property in the area. Do you know of a place near town with some land?"

"Well I've got a three hundred acre farm on my books, is that big enough?"

Rosie laughed,

"I think that my sister gave you the wrong idea, how about a place with one or two acres"

He went over his list and found two places that might interest them and he was available, after lunch, to show them around.

The first would have been a nice find except it was on the busy highway, at least as busy as Redrock ever got. The sisters looked at it for a long time then dismissed it. The second was a small farm with five acres of pasture land. There was a barn and a fairly new house

and Anne seemed to like it but Rosemary had no interest. Out of curiosity Charley asked what she disliked about it.

“It has no character, here it sits in the middle of flat fields of alfalfa. If there were ever any trees around it they’re gone now. I just don’t ever see myself liking the way it looks.”

Charley had heard this before. A man would see the fields and the barn as good things and the lack of trees meant less maintenance and water bills. His wife or in this case, these girls saw it and flat and drab.

“I do have another place but I’m not sure that it’s what your looking for. It’s a small house up in Rattlesnake Canyon, there’s two acres of land but with all of the rocks and trees there’s room for a garden but not much else. The house is really more of a cabin but it does have telephone and electricity. The water’s from a well and there’s a fairly new septic tank for sewage. Its four miles up a private road that the county doesn’t maintain or snow plough. There are several other places up there and someone always clears off the snow so they can get to town. If I haven’t scared you off by now we can drive up and look it over.”

When they turned off the highway there was a locked gate with a sign warning that trespassers were not allowed. Someone had drawn the outline of a rifle under the warning which caused the girls looked at each other but Charley dismissed it.

“Oh don’t be concerned with that, this is Montana and people take pride in being self sufficient but it’s mostly just bluff.”

He unlocked one of the six padlocks on the chain and they drove up the canyon. When they got into the hills, the county was very pretty. There were groves of aspen and spruce and a stream ran near the road and where the canyon widened there were several beaver ponds. In the first couple of miles they saw three deer but the girls were sure that there must be many more nearby.

They came to a small farm with a house and barn. It was probably ten acre of fields planted in corn and in the distance a man was sitting on a tractor watching the car. Charley waved but if the man saw him he made no sign.

“That’s Karl Hamilton, he and his wife have lived here forever. He’s from one of the old-time families here in the valley, his son Rex lives in town.”

When they got to the house, it was as Charley had described. It had originally been just a cabin that had been built many years ago but there were at least two additions that had enlarged it to what it was today. It sat back from the road in a grove of trees that nearly hid it completely.

They walked around the back and looked at the two acres. Through the trees they could see a flat area on the bank of the stream and just below that was a beaver pond. As the girls walked out into the sunshine they held hands and marveled at the beauty that was before them. They heard a screech from above and looked up to see a pair of golden eagles circling against the azure sky.

Rosie squeezed Annie's hand and whispered,
"Don't get too excited yet, the house is probably a dump"

The house was old but spotlessly clean. It had been cobbled together over the years into two bedrooms, a fair-sized living room with a stone fireplace and a pot-bellied stove. The big kitchen had plenty of room for a table and chairs and a small bathroom with a toilet and shower looked like a recent addition. The house was completely furnished but it had obviously been un-lived in for sometime.

"Ok Charley, what's the deal on this place?" Rosie asked.

"Well ladies, this is an odd one. The man who lived here most of his life disappeared several years ago. No one knows where he went or what happened to him. The first time anyone suspected anything was when he failed to pay his light bill. After six months the electric company tried to get up the road to turn off the power but they couldn't get in.

When the property tax weren't paid, the town counsel asked the sheriff to look into it. Well, the sheriff doesn't have any jurisdiction up here and none of the neighbors would let him in so there was nothing that he could do. The second year that the taxes weren't paid, the mayor asked the state police to look into it. Of course they have jurisdiction everywhere so they cut the lock and came up.

What they found is what you see. The old man was just gone. The house was clean and the dishes were washed, the bed was made and his clothes were washed and put away but he was gone. His jeep is in the barn but his horse was missing. The state police couldn't find any evidence of a crime and they had no idea where he had gone. They finally guessed that he had ridden his horse into the hills and something like a heart attack or a snakebite got him.

The town counsel tried to find any relatives but there was no one. They finally seized the property for back taxes and they have held it for seven years. The judge ruled that the man was most likely dead and the town wants to sell the place. Everything is included in the price but you'll have to get a current registration on the Jeep."

Rosie and Annie walked to the beaver pond and talked privately. Annie was excited and ready to buy but Rosie wasn't sure about the neighbors.

"Damn, I don't mind people being private but I don't want to live near moon-shiners or a giant meth-lab"

"Ok dear, lets go meet them"

Charley wasn't too sure that he wanted to drive much farther up the canyon but he did know the family at the next place.

"These folks are the remains of a hippy commune that came up here in the sixties. Oh, there were lots of hippies in Redrock then. They came here to smoke dope and make love and stop shaving. Most of them didn't last through the first winter but a few stayed. There's several men and women and kids that live up the canyon about a mile. I see them in town sometimes and most of them are friendly. An old man named Button owns that place but he spends a lot of Time in California. People say that they're growing dope for a living but most people including me don't care."

When Charley drove up to the house, woman with long gray hair came to greet them. Her name was Naomi and she said that there were two women and a couple of men staying there at the moment. She said that there were three kids but that they didn't cause any trouble.

Charley drove the girls back to their car at the cafe and said that if they were interested in the place, he could get all of the paperwork done in one day. That night they had dinner at Mom's Kitchen and found that the small town cook did a fine job on chicken-fried steak.

Back in their room they sat and smiled at each other.

"What do you think sweetie?" Annie asked.

I think that it's great. Did you see the eagles and the beaver in the pond? So what if we wont be drinking wine with the neighbors, hell that's why we left San Francisco."

Annie found her make-up bag and took out a little silver box that held her stash of marijuana,

"Should we...?" she asked.

"Better not, we don't want to get off on the wrong foot"

Annie looked disappointed but she put the box away and found a bottle of vodka instead. She went to the bathroom and poured two big shots into the plastic drinking glasses and handed one to Rosie.

"Here's to you, dear, lets warm our bellies" Annie said.

Karl Hamilton

Karl Hamilton was the sixth of nine children born to Phillip and Amy Hamilton in Perkins Montana in 1948. He had a sister who was the oldest and four older brothers who showed no interest in him. The novelty of raising children had long since worn off for his parents who had turned over most of their responsibility to their oldest daughter. He was just an anonymous face in a gang of stair-step children. His sister made sure that he was fed and clean but not much else.

He started high school in 1962 just as the social changes that swept the country in that decade had reached rural Montana. By the time he was sixteen he was smoking marijuana and had slept with several of the towns finest young ladies. At the start of his senior year he was in love with Beth Ann Miller who was as caught up in the pseudo hippy lifestyle as he was. They smoked pot and made love in the backseat of his old ford every chance that they got and through no good sense on their behalf, she graduated without being pregnant.

They both knew that they would marry and settle down to a sedate life in Montana but now it was the summer of 1966 and they wanted to live, without rules for a while. Karl told his sister that he was going to take a trip and see the country and he left it up to her to tell their parents. Beth told her parents that she was going to run away and marry Karl . She promised to call often while on her honeymoon but she cautioned them that she was old enough to make decisions for herself. Although her parents wanted a family wedding, they reluctantly approved

Karl and Beth drove to San Francisco and joined the scene in The Hait with the sea of leather clad, dope smoking free spirits. In reality, they were faking it. They were expose to all of the popular drugs but they only smoked pot, and not much of that. Surrounded by the rampant practice of free love, Beth and Karl thought that it was fun to flirt with others but when it came to bedtime, they knew their place.

When the summer was gone and the cold San Francisco rain took the fun out of the summer of love, they headed for Montana. They planned to marry and Karl would find a job. To their surprise, waiting for them was a summons for Karl to report to the Selective Service office. He had been drafted and a quick phone call revealed that the Army didn't mind if Karl was married but it wouldn't change anything. For the next two years he was going to be in the Army. Telling no one, they drove to the county seat and were married at the courthouse.

All of the talk in basic training was about the war in Vietnam. Unlike most of the others, Karl had no objections, after all, his country needed him and they were asking for his help. Like most people in Montana, he was fiercely patriotic and he resented anyone that wouldn't support his country.

At the end of basic training he was given a ten day leave before his advanced infantry training but when he greeted Beth she looked a little apprehensive.

“What’s wrong Honey, aren’t you glad to see me?”
“Oh Karl, I’ve missed you so much but I’m afraid that your going to be mad at me”
“I doubt that unless you’ve found another guy”
“I think I’m pregnant, please don’t be mad”
“I’m not mad, I’m happy. Wow When do you think that it happened?”
“Around the time that we came back from California”
“Beth, are you going to be alright living with your folks while I’m gone?”
“Is there anyway that I could go with you while your in the army?”
“If I got stationed in the states you could but I don’t think that it’s going to happen. If I go to Vietnam and come home with less then six months to serve, they’ll let me out early.”
“Oh baby, what if something happened in Vietnam, what would I do?”
“I’ve already told you about the insurance and stuff, I guess that if I didn’t come back, you’ll marry the second handsomest guy in Montana”

Karl did come home, and he did get out early. He had seen some bad things but he didn’t get a scratch. He was thrilled with his new son, Rex and his chubby wife. She had given up marijuana and had taken to Pepsi and potato chips. She said that a wife and mom didn’t need to watch her weight the way that she had in high school.

Karl found a job at a small airport in the neighboring town and he and his family settled down in a one bedroom apartment. The work wasn’t very sophisticated and at first most of his time was spent putting gas into airplanes and trying to keep the field open with a sweeper and a snow plough. The following year he was helping an aircraft machine do maintenance on the planes and two years later he was a Citified Aircraft and Engine mechanic.

Both he and Beth were disappointed that they had no more children. After an extensive physical examination of Beth and an embarrassing test of his sperm, the doctors concluded that they had been very fortunate to have had a child at all.

With Karl’s A&E license came a raise in pay and they were rapidly outgrowing their small apartment. Karl wanted a place in the country where they could have a big garden and maybe raise some cattle for their own table. The found just what they were looking for up in a canyon near town. Beth didn’t like the name, Rattlesnake Canyon, but she liked the house and the land.

Before the real estate agent signed the final papers he warned the Hamilton’s that a commune of hippies lived farther up the canyon. Only a few stayed over the winter but there might be quite a few in good weather. Karl asked if they caused any trouble and the agent said that they weren’t any trouble at all, as far as he knew they just stayed to themselves smoking dope and made love.

Beth laughed at their new address, Karl Hamilton, PO Box 129, Redrock Montana.

Timothy Van Dam

For Timothy Van Dam growing up in rural Mississippi had its rewards and its drawbacks but for him it was mostly rewards, at least at first. He was born in 1967, the only child of the Reverend Walter Van Dam and his wife Heidi.

Walt Van Dam was a bright young Baptist minister in Illinois when the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had become the law according to Lyndon Johnson. As a seminary student he had participated in the Civil Rights marches during his summer vacations and although he had never met Martin Luther King he greatly admired his work.

He was the assistant minister of a small church in rural Illinois when he married a pretty girl who had recently immigrated from Holland. Heidi was as blond and blue-eyed as he was dark. She looked like a poster girl for a Dutch travel agency and if she had worn her hair in braids with a pair of wooden shoes then she would have been perfect in the role.

After a few months of wedded bliss, he discovered a stubborn side to his new wife. She was very ambitious and often asked when he would get his own church. When he explained that unless they moved into the inner city or to some far-off place, it would be several years before he had that opportunity. She immediately wanted to know why they didn't move immediately. She wasn't willing to wait for some pastor to die so they could advance.

Walt was quite happy in Illinois, he had grown up not far away and he had gone to school in Chicago. His family was near and on his few forays into the slums of the city he had been very uncomfortable. Although he had spent a summer in the poor, black, south he was still ill at ease around African-Americans in general.

He thought that Heidi's ambitions had turned in another direction when she busied herself with reorganizing the church office but he was wrong. At breakfast she gave him three flyers seeking pastors for churches in need.

One was a church in East Saint Louis whose present minister had suddenly retired after an unfortunate fire had nearly destroyed their building. The second was for a church in south-central Los Angeles but Spanish language was strongly recommended. The last was a church on a privately owned island in coastal Mississippi.

He offered his wife several reasons why none of these opportunities were good fits for them but she strongly suggested that he pursue one of them. She favored LA because it was near Hollywood and she had heard that the weather was nice in California. She said that he could learn Spanish, and after all, she had learned English in a fairly short time.

Not wanting to get into a discussion on the problems of learning a foreign language quickly, he said that he would look into the prospect in Mississippi.

“There, that wasn’t so hard was it” She said with a smile.

His letter to Mino Agra-industry Inc., Mino Island Mississippi, brought an immediately reply. There was a nice letter expressing an interest in his résumé and a brochure showing pictures of the island and various work opportunities and there was a toll-free number for him to call to arrange an interview. Together with Heidi, they looked through the brochure.

Mino Island was several thousand acres of farm land in Bay Saint Louis on the Mississippi coast between Gulfport and Lake Pontchartrian Louisiana and the Mino family had raised chili peppers on the island for over a hundred years. They shared this profitable market with the Tabasco Co. which was located a few miles to the west on Avery Island in Louisiana. The company provided living quarters and other needs for its 2300 employees in a modern housing complex. According to the brochure there were schools, restaurants, a theater, a commissary, a Catholic and a Baptist church. Pictured in beautiful color were white sand beaches, oak trees beside a tranquil lagoon, and the tree lined streets of the living area. Heidi insisted that he call for an interview right away.

Welcome to Mississippi

Living on Mino Island was pleasant for the new minister and his wife. Of the 2300 employs of the company, about three hundred attended the Baptist church in two services. About two thirds were black field hands and their families and the rest were the white overseers, engineers, and office staff and Walter was surprised to find that he had a black assistant minister to supervise. It didn't take long for him to realize that despite the Presidents Civil Right Act, Mino Island was divided into black and white.

Timothy Alan Van Dam was born in Gulfport General Hospital on April 4th, 1967 and the company allocated a larger house to the Reverend and his wife. Tim's mother was a little disappointed that he had brown hair and brown eyes instead of her blond curls and light blue eyes. When he was baby and a toddler there was always a local girl to help Heidi cope with the active child. While the schools were no longer segregated, the white children tended to cluster together but the boy was exposed to black and white children from across the spectrum of the Mino employees. In theory all children were taught the same and were graded the same but, in fact, the whites were definitely thought, at least by their teachers, to be more intelligent.

When Tim entered high school in the fall of 1982, he encountered his first black teacher. Coach Jefferson had been hired to give some illusion of equality and unfortunately for Tim, the Coach thought that the illusion was true. When he tried out for the football team, as a white boy he had expected to be a starter but when he became a bench warmer behind the son of a field hand so he quit the team.

As a student he was actually quite bright and would have received good grades anywhere, but on Mino Island, he was a star. He did have a few disciplinary problems and one in particular could have been his undoing.

An allegation of sexual misconduct came to the attention of the principal and he knew that he couldn't just ignore the problem or it would bring the state police to the island. It seems that a black girl who was the daughter of a lead field hand had told a friend that Tim had raped her in his car one night after some school social function. The Principal decided that the best way to get to the bottom of it was to interview the girl and her father. He contacted the man's Forman and asked him to bring the two to his office. The Forman choose to do this when he handed the man his paycheck.

When the interview started, the girl and her father sat across the desk from the principal. She was pretty and she was very nervous. While the Principal looked at them she continually tried to pull down the hem of her short skirt to cover knees while her father, wearing bib overalls and muddy brogan shoes, sat looking at his lap.

"Now Shanice, I understand that something happened to you while you were with Tim Van Dam last Friday night. I was told that you claimed that you were raped. Is that true?" She looked quickly at her father who continued staring at his lap.

"Oh no Mr. Cullpepper, I wasn't raped, no not at all"

“Did you and Mr. Van Dam have sex?”

“Yes sir, we did but it was my idea. He wouldn’t have done it if I hadn’t asked him”

“You still have a bruise on your cheek, did Tim do that?”

“Oh no sir, when I got home I fell on the front steps, Mr. Van Dam has always been a gentleman and he would never hurt me or anyone, I just did it myself”

“Mr. Washington, are you satisfied that Tim Van Dam did not rape or hurt your daughter?”

Her dad looked up from his lap with an obvious look of relief.

“Yes Sir, It weren’t his fault and he never hurt my girl but I’m going to hurt her with my belt when we gets home”

Standing but not offering to shake hands, the Principal dismissed the field hand.

“Thank you Mr. Washington, I’ll instruct your Forman not to deducted any lost work time spent in this meeting and Shanice, I think that you should keep your drawers on until your married”

Tim was waiting in the Principal’s outer office when he saw the Washington’s leave. Mr. Cullpepper called him and closed the door.

“Ok Van Dam, you’re off the hook but the next time you take a girl’s panties off in the back seat of your car make damn sure that she says yes, five times before doing it”

“Mr. Cullpepper, I didn’t ...”

“Bullshit! Just remember that if she’d been white, you’d be in the Gulfport jail tonight. Now get the hell out of here”

Like most of his teachers, Tim was fiercely patriotic and a devout Christian, at least in a public way. His high school goal was to be accepted at the US Military Academy at West Point and he had sent a request to see the local US Congressman to secure the appointment. In due time, he was summoned to the Congressman’s local office for an interview with an assistant.

When the congressman’s staff member had looked over Tim’s résumé and school records he assured Tim that he was an excellent prospect but the congressman was under a lot of pressure from the Affirmative Action people to nominate a black student. He said that decision would be made within the next week.

At school, Tim told the story to Mr. Cullpepper who was outraged with Affirmative Action, northern liberals, do-gooders, sob-sisters and the non-white world in general. When Tim left his office, the Principal used his connections to learn the name and school of the black student that Tim was up against. Again using the underground network of teachers, he called the boys Principal and suggested a dinner that night so they could discuss a purposed quail hunt in the very predictive grasslands of Mino Island.

Within three days the Van Dams received a letter congratulating Timothy on his appointment to West Point

Over hill, over dale, we will hit the dusty trail ...

Tim finished his four years at West Point and in May of 1989 he was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant in the regular army and was assigned to the language school at Fort Ord California. While he had hoped to study Chinese, he was assigned to learn Arabic.

For the next year he studied the language four hours a day and the culture of Islam for another four hours. At first, the subtleties of the language seemed impossible, but in time it came to him. He found the cultural studies equally as confusing. There seemed to be an endless variety in the interpretations of the teachings of Islam. It was difficult to understand why women in Afghanistan were forbidden to show a sliver of skin in public while their neighbors in Pakistan had a woman Prime Minister.

In June of 1990 Tim Graduated from the Fort Ord school and was given a thirty day leave in anticipation of his assignment to Incirlik Air force Base in Turkey. Tim knew that while Incirlik was a major Air Force installation in Turkey, it was also the chief Army intelligence listening post for the Middle East.

Tim's first month was interesting but when he had the opportunity to use his new language abilities and he found that he still had a ways to go. It was one thing to ask a series of preformatted questions and another to try and order a meal from a menu in the bazaar. Even understanding a question about the time became a challenge of 'What time is it', 'what's the time', how late is it, 'got the time' and so on. Tim had heard stories of foreigners visiting America and being completely baffled when a waitress asked if the order was 'to-go'. Now he understood their problem.

Anne and Rosie – The early years.

Anne and Rosemary Jones weren't the sisters that their name implied. They both grew up in small towns in Iowa and they both elected to attend the small, liberal arts college where they met. It was by chance of fate that they were both named Jones but it was a common name. Perhaps it was the same fate that made them roommates in the dormitory when they arrived for their freshman year.

There were some curious similarities between them. They were nearly the same age, both were slender with light-brown hair and blue eyes and while they both had nice, even features, they could be best described as non-descript. Both made good grades in high school but neither had qualified for a scholarship. Both were quiet but not actually shy. Annie hadn't dated in high school while Rosie had a single boyfriend and that hadn't turned out very well.

Their freshman year had passed with little excitement and both spent their summer at home with their families. They had decided to share an apartment for their sophomore year and had returned a week early to get settled. Each was surprised at how happy they were to see the other.

They found a nice, one-bedroom flat near the college and move in. There was only one double bed and they decided to make-do until they could replace it with twins. Neither was modest and they had both grown up sharing a bed with a sister.

Annie had decided on Library Science as her major and Rosie was still undecided but she had already took three classes in Art History.

“How are you going to make any money with a degree in Art History?”

“How are you going to make more than minimum wage as a librarian? I know that you're a bookworm, why don't you major in Lit?”

“It's too hard, now I read what I like but if I majored in it I would have to read everything”

About mid-year they discovered vodka and most night's after dinner they would mix it with orange juice and get pleasant high. The drink erased any shyness between them and they talked for hours about everything. They laughed and became animated but they never became intoxicated but just merry.

As the end of their sophomore year approached they realized that they didn't want to be apart for the summer. Telling their families that they had to take summer classes they stayed in their apartment and each found a summer job. With no classes to occupy their time they walked in the park, went to movies and out for cheap dinners.

They weren't old enough to buy liquor but they always found a friend to help out. Once, although she had asked for vodka, Annie got a bottle of Tequila by mistake. That night they had a different experience with their nightly cocktails. The tequila was stronger than the cheap vodka that they usually drank and had a different effect on them. After two too many tequila sunrises, Annie started to cry. As Rosie held her and tried to comfort her, Annie wanted to know why they never had dates with men. She wanted to know why they were never asked out by anyone.

Rosie tried to explain,

"We probably give off the wrong signals. Do you want to go on dates?"

"How the hell would I know, I've never been on a date. Just look at us, two drunk virgins setting in Iowa drinking Tequila, are we pathetic or what?"

"One virgin"

"What?"

"Just one of us is a virgin"

"Your not?"

"Nope"

"I didn't think that you dated in high school, did something happen last summer?"

"No, it was in high school, I went on three dates with a guy from my church. The first two were to the movies and the last one was to my senior prom. I was about to graduate and I thought that I was the last virgin in Iowa, so we did it."

"How was it?"

"It was awful, he hurt me and then he acted like a jerk. Later he called to try and make up but I ran him off and now I'm sitting in an apartment in Iowa with a virgin drinking Tequila, and I like it"

Their junior year was much the same. They both went home to visit their families during spring break, and they both turned 21. Being able to order wine with dinner and to go to the local bars was a novelty and they took advantage of it.

They were flattered by the attention that they got from guys in bars and while they understood that the men's main objective was to get them into bed, they still enjoyed the social life. Without exception, they turned down every decent and indecent offer that they received.

The summer between their junior and senior year they decided to take a road trip in Anne's Volkswagen. They had saved a tidy sum of money and, although they had no schedule they thought that they might be gone for a couple of months.

"Ok Rosie, what would you like to see on this trip?"

"I want to see the ocean"

"What ocean, the Indian Ocean or maybe the Artic Ocean?"

"No, god damn it, I don't want to drive to the North Pole, I want to see the Pacific Ocean"

“Well, there’s a Pacific Ocean in Mexico”

“Annie, you can be a pain in the ass, I want to see the ocean in California and I want to see it from the Golden Gate Bridge, is that specific for you?”

They drove across the hot fields of Nebraska singing along with the radio and when they arrived in Denver in the early evening and they were disappointed that the city was as flat as Iowa. Somehow they had expected it to be in the mountains. How could a ‘Mile High’ city sit on the flat plains?

The next morning dawned cool and clear and from the window of their room in the Motel 6 they were thrilled at the spectacle of the front range of the Rockies with its snow capped peaks calling them. It took them two days to cross Colorado. Every few miles there was mountain pass or river gorge or an old mining town that had to be explored.

Eastern Utah was an extension of the grandeur of Colorado but after Salt Lake City the country turned arid as they crossed the ‘Great Basin’ that had been such an obstacle to the pioneers in their covered wagons.

Nevada was monotonous and dry as they headed towards the wall of the Sierra Nevada. They were very amused at the billboards along the way advertising legal brothels.

“You know that if that art history thing doesn’t work out for you, there’s probably a job opportunity at the Kitty Kat Ranch in Warm Springs, Nevada” Annie chided her friend.

“Well I’d be unique, I’ll bet that there isn’t a girl working there wearing a 34-B bra”

“I don’t think they wear bras”

“Ok, with a 32-A bust line”

San Francisco was everything that they had hoped for. It was big and busy and urban and exciting. Dorothy’s line about “Not being in Kansas anymore” described what the girls felt.

They found a cheap motel in the wrong part of town and settled in to see the sights and have a San Francisco experience. They spent the first two days at the usual tourists spots where they rode the cable cars and ate cioppino at Fisherman’s wharf and god-knows-what in China Town. They went through six rolls of film asking strangers to snap their picture. On the third day they crossed the bay bridge and visited the campus of the University of California at Berkeley. They were amazed at the size of the school and they were sure that their college in Iowa was smaller than the Business Department at Cal.

While eating lunch in the student union, Rosie struck up a conversation with a couple of California girls at the next table. She asked where they might find some nighttime entertainment in the City and she was given the names of three clubs and some idea of

the prices and what they could expect. That evening, in their seedy motel room Rosie looked at the list.

“Here’s one called ‘Swanks’, the girls said that it was lots of fun but a little expensive.”

“Ok, what’s next?” Annie asked.

“The Vault is in the financial district and is supposed to be a hot spot to meet yuppie guys. They said that the better you dress, the more attention you get”

“Well I guess that I could pick the hayseeds out of my best gingham dress and we could go there”

“Ok smart-ass, this one sounds right up your ally. ‘Venus’ is a small place with drinks and music, the dress is casual but you shouldn’t wear sneakers or jeans. The best thing about it is it’s in our neighborhood”

At nine that night, they were dressed in their best casual clothes as they walked down the stairs into a dim, smoky lounge. There was a girl in the corner playing a piano and softly singing a blues song while a few couples swayed to the music on a tiny dance floor. The rest of the room was nearly filled with young people drinking and talking. Rosie found a place for them to sit while Annie bought two vodka martinis.

Finally, sipping their drinks the girls got a chance to look around.

“Rosie, do you notice anything unusual about this place?”

“Well I think that California casual is dressier than Iowa casual”

“What else”

“What? ... Oh my god, they’re all women”

“Anything else?”

“Annie! They’re ... homosexual women ... queer women”

“They’re called gay or lesbian, not queer”

“Look at that couple, they look like they’re doing-it right there on the dance floor”

A tall, pretty girl walked by and smiled at Rosie.

“My god Rosie, you get all the attention, I can’t even get a lesbian to smile at me. Do you think that I should go and ask one of them to dance?”

“I think that we should get the hell out of here before you blush so hard that you glow in the dark”

“Hey, I’m the one that wants to dance ... Ok.. Ok... I’m leaving”

Back in the motel room, with their casual clothes neatly folded and packed, the pajama clad girl’s sipped vodka and Sprite and talked about their evening.

“You should have seen your face when you realized that it was a gay bar” Annie teased.
“Well you were very calm about it. The few gay girls in our college would never dance and carry on like that in public”
“I didn’t know that there were any gay girls at our school”
“Oh come on, what about those two across that hall in the dorm”
“I don’t know, they seemed normal to me”
“You didn’t find the crew-cut weight lifter and the ever-so-fimmy girl to be an odd couple? Didn’t you ever notice how they touched each other?”
“Sure I thought that they were a little odd but I never thought that it was about sex”
“Well, Annie dear, what you know about sex you could put in a tea cup”
“I know about sex, I took sex-ed in the eleventh grade just like everyone else.”
“Did they teach you about homosexuals?”
“No but I heard some of the other girls talking about it so I’m not completely ignorant”
“Ok let see, the twenty-one year old virgin is drinking vodka with her nearly virgin roommate in a motel room in the sex capitol of the known universe and she says that she knows all about sex”
“Something like that”

The trip north along the rugged coast and through towering redwoods was spectacular. Coastal Oregon was either misty or raining and they thought that it was probably very pretty in the sunshine but they doubted that it happened very often. The flat farm land of Idaho gave way to the mountains of Montana and the wondrous sights of Yellowstone National Park.

They actually drove farther into Montana than they had intended. They found the mountains beautiful and the border between the mountains and the rolling plains was very pleasant. They liked the small towns in the foothills between the towering peaks and the vast sea of grass that stretched for hundreds of miles to the south.

They had intended to visit the Custer National Battlefield but they were sidetracked by an Indian festival in a tiny town near the Crow Reservation. They were really caught up in the legions and rituals of these native Americans. They were so caught up that they stayed an extra day to listen to the drums and watch the dancers.

When it was over, they were ready for home. They didn’t stop in South Dakota and after what seemed like thousands of miles of highway, hundreds of fast-food burgers and many night’s in motel rooms, they were back in their little college town and their own bed.

The start of their last year in college brought the realization that it was actually going to end. Their three years in college and twelve years of school had been a forever thing. Even high school graduation didn’t bring closure because college was a forgone fact. Now, it just eight more months, it was going to end. They didn’t discuss it but they were both thinking about it.

Something, out of the ordinary, happened after Thanksgiving, Annie was asked on a date. Actually she was asked on a double date. A guy that she had known from a couple of classes asked her to go to the Christmas dance.

“Anne, my brother and I would like to take you and your sister to the Christmas dance”

Both Annie and Rosie had long since stopped trying to tell people that they weren’t sisters because everyone assumed it and they just let them think that it was true.

“I don’t know Ralph, I’ll have to ask Rosie if she’s busy”

“Look I know that we don’t know each other very well so how about we all go for pizza and beer and see how we all get along”

“I think that we could do that, when do you want to go?”

“Tonight”

“No, how about Friday”

“Should we pick you up?”

“No we will meet you at Paracono’s at six”

“Six is a little early, how about eight?”

“Sorry, we can be there at six”

“Ok, we’ll see you there”

“YOU DID WHAT?”

“I made a dinner date for us with Ralph and Eddy Bower, Friday night at six”

“The Bower brothers, you mean those hayseeds from some big farm down south?”

“They’re the ones”

“God girl, you sure can pick them”

“Well, since you haven’t had a date in five years, I guess that I can pick them better than you”

“Hey, I was the one that the girl in San Francisco smiled at”

They had pizza and a glass of beer with the boys and despite being a little stiff at first the evening was pleasant. Since the Christmas dance was still three weeks away they agreed to go to dinner and a movie the following weekend. Dinner included two glasses of wine and Ralph held Annie’s hand in the theater while Eddy kissed Rosie.

The following night at a roadhouse, they drank beer and danced. Neither of the girls had danced since high school but they managed ok. That night Ralph kissed Annie and Eddy tried to unsnap Rosie’s bra. The next weekend they had dinner and another movie where Eddy became very pushy with Rosie and Ralph had to be continually reminded to keep his hands off of Annie’s knee.

That night while they snuggled in bed the girls discussed their experiences.

“Rosie, do you like Eddy?”

“He’s ok I guess”

“Do you like kissing him?”

“The kissing is ok but I don’t like him pawing me. He’s always trying to feel my breasts or pull up my skirt. I’ve told him to stop but he just laughs and says that I really don’t mean it”

“Ralph tries to pull up my skirt too. Do you feel any attraction to Eddy?”

“Not really”

“Why do you go out with him?”

“Well, you want to go out with Ralph and I want to be with you”

“I don’t want to go with Ralph I just go along so I can be with you”

The next day, the Bower brothers were dumped by the Jones sisters.

The girls went home for Christmas. They would have preferred to spend the time together but there was no excuse that would have satisfied either family. Annie dropped Rosie off at the bus station on her way out of town. She carries Rosie’s bag while she bought her ticket and then they walked to her bus. They often hugged but this time Annie kissed her friend goodbye.

They were home for ten days and they talked on the phone everyday. During the after-Christmas sales, they each bought the other a present. When Annie picked Rosie up at the bus station, they kissed hello.

That night after talking for hours and drinking several vodka martinis, they snuggled into bed and Annie kissed Rosie goodnight. They had no school the next day so they made coffee and took the newspaper back to bed. While she was reading, Annie could tell that Rosie wanted to talk about something but so far she had said nothing.

“What?” Annie asked.

“Don’t get mad”

“Just talk”

“Annie, you’ve kissed me three times now, does that mean your queer?”

“It’s gay or lesbian, not queer and of course I’m neither of those things”

“You never kissed me before”

“Maybe you never needed kissing”

“Do I need it now?”

“Look, do you kiss your mother?”

“Of course”

“Your sister?”

“Yes”

“How about the family dog?”

“I guess, are you being silly?”

“Well I kiss my mom and dad, two sisters, a brother-in-law, the family dog and you”

“Ok, thank you, I guess”

In the spring Annie had a question for Rosie.

“What are you going to do after graduation?”

“I don’t know, get a job I guess, why?”

“Well you have to face the fact that college is over in six weeks and some planning might be a good thing, are you going home to live with your family?”

“Hell no ... I don’t know, I thought that we would probably do something together”

“Ok, what if I said that I had met a guy and I was getting married and moving to Africa?”

“Well I know that you haven’t met a guy but I guess we could move to Africa ... if that’s what you want.”

“Damn Rosie, do you ever take life seriously?”

“Every goddamned day, so what’s your point?”

“I have a job in San Francisco as a school librarian, will you come with me?”

“Does that mean the Africa thing is off?”

Hello World – May 1986

The day after graduation the girls loaded everything that they owned into the Volkswagen and Annie dropped Rosie at the bus station. She would spend a week with her family while Rosie did the same. The following week, Annie would pick Rosie up at her home and the San Francisco adventure would begin. At the curb in front of the bus station they said their goodbyes.

“Next Wednesday, I’ll be at your house in the afternoon, will it be alright with your folks if I spend the night, then we’ll get an early start Thursday?”

“Your not just saying this while you intend to dump me are you? I saw you talking to that girl down the hall, are you going with her and stealing my stuff?”

“Do you mean the weight lifter? She’s too big for your stuff, what would she do with a 33-B bra?”

“Ok then I guess you can go and I’ll just trust you so give me a kiss and get out of here”

Annie’s parents were very proud of their newly graduated daughter and they had arranged a party in her honor. It was a gala occasion with her sisters, brother-in-law, her aunt and uncle and several cousins. When everyone had arrived her dad gave a little speech about how proud they were and her mom gave her a watch. Her dad was looking in his desk but couldn’t find what he was after.

“Annie, I must have left it in the garage, will you check just inside the door for me?”

She hurried to the garage expecting to find a box or bag but when she opened the door there was something else. Sitting by itself and pointed outwards was a new, bright red, Mustang Convertible. The top was down and the white leather upholstery gleamed.

Suddenly her parents were hugging her and her little sister had jumped in and turned the radio on way too loud. For the next hour she gave rides to all of her guests and later her dad barbequed hamburgers and corn on the cob. In the cool of the evening she swam with her sisters in the family pool and they played like they were kids.

That night Annie was dressing for bed while her little sister Jeanie looked on. They had to share the bedroom because her mom had converted her old bedroom to a reading room. She didn't mind and Jeanie could be very nice when she wanted to be.

"Annie, are you excited about moving to the big city?"

"I guess, I like San Francisco, do you remember that I visited there a couple of years ago?"

"Yea you went with Rosie. Did you meet any hot guys?"

Annie laughed.

"Not exactly" then she told Jeanie about their accidentally trip to the gay bar.

"Oh my god, were you embarrassed to tears?"

"No but it wasn't the kind of thing that you see every day. Rosie teased me about it for months"

"Rosie's going to San Francisco with you now. You guys are really tight aren't you?"

"We're best friends. You have a best friend don't you?"

"Sure, I've had several. Did you date guys in college?"

"Sure, we both did but I didn't find anyone that swept me off of my feet"

"Did you ... you know ... do it?"

"That's none of your business Miss nosey pants"

"How about Rosie?"

"Same answer"

"I've done it"

"Jeanie, you haven't"

"Yes I have"

"Do you want to tell me about it?"

"That's none of your business Miss nosey pants"

"You be careful honey, you can get emotionally and physically hurt"

"I've talked to Margo and she said that she did it in high school"

"Well, our big sister is married to the guy that she did it with and I was the one who listened to her cry herself to sleep when she thought that she was pregnant"

They went to bed and switched off the lights. Jeanie snuggled close to her big sister and asked,

"Annie can I ask for a favor?"

"Of course honey"

"Can I have your Volkswagen?"

The town, where Rosie lived, was located in the southwest corner of the state and it was nearly obscured by the corn fields but it didn't take Annie long to locate the house by following the map that her friend had drawn for her.

The Jones home was a big, white two-story house on an acre of land. Annie could see a barn in the back where Rosie and her sister had kept a horse at one time. There was a big tree in the backyard with a swing and a swimming pool. It looked like a very nice place to have grown up.

Rosie met her at the door and was excited about her new car. Rosie's mom and dad looked like Annie had expected. They were proud of their daughter but her dad was still in the dark as how she was going to use her degree in art history. After a dinner of meat and potatoes the girls went for a tour of the town and bought an ice cream at the Dairy Queen.

"My first job was here, I was sixteen and I got a lot of action from the guys."

"Yea, what kind of action?"

"You know, 'hey, can I have two scoops of chocolate '... stuff like that'"

"Well, in those paper hats and with your tiny titties they probably thought that you were a boy"

"Yea, I wasn't very well endowed then but I've grown"

"You forget, honey, I've seen you in the shower, what's grown are the pads in your bra, although those new silicone things that you bought do look pretty good"

"Yes they do, would you like to feel them?"

"I think I'll pass on that"

Life in the big city

They found a tiny apartment in a nearly-gay, nearly-slum and sometimes nearly-dangerous part of town. It was what modern Sociologists call a racially diverse neighborhood. They were blacks and whites and brown's and yellows and any other color that one could think of. It had three things going for it, there was a garage for the Mustang, it was near the bus line and it was cheap.

Annie's new job was five bus stops away and initially Rosie was the house mom but after watching daytime TV for a week she set out to put her art history degree to work. Three bus stops towards the bay she found a hippy shop with a 'Help Wanted' sign in the window. The owner was a woman in her forties who looked like a flower child from the sixties. She sold the tourist, incense, love beads, lava lamps, an assortment of tie-dyed tee shirts, muumuu's, leather sandals and an amazing array of drug paraphernalia.

She said her name was Karma although she had been Elizabeth Atkins when her journey started. She had run away from a stepfather who was more interested in sleeping with her than raising her and she had come to San Francisco when Haight Ashbury had been the destination of choice for every free spirit in America. She laughed when she remembered her arrival in the City.

She had come on the bus with nineteen dollars in her pocket and that afternoon she joined a crowd to watch a nineteen year-old Jerry Garcia smoke dope and play magic with his guitar from a curb on Ashbury street. That night she slept in a loft with twenty stoned boys and girls and she laughed when she said that she couldn't remember a sober day since.

Rosie took the job and wondered how she was going to tell Annie. She never wanted to disappoint her friend and she knew that she would get a lecture on throwing away her education. With the prospects of a paycheck every Friday, she stopped at the lacquer store and spent most of her remaining cash on a bottle of Stolichvinsky vodka which was a vast improvement over the crap that they had been drinking. She bought a quarter pound of smoked salmon and a box of thin little crackers. When Annie arrived home she was greeted by many candles, salmon, crackers and an ice cold vodka martini.

"Hi Rosie, what's the special occasion?"

"Just glad to see you sweetheart, how was your day?"

"It was good ... I'll be out in a minute"

Annie went into the bedroom and stripped off her work clothes. She had enough of pantyhose and wool skirts for the day, she tossed her panties and bra into the clothes hamper and slipped a yellow kimono over her head. It was her favorite new thing since she bought it the day that they rented the apartment and she loved the feel of the silk on her bare skin.

Rosie had put some soft music on the cheap stereo that they had brought from college and now they lounged on pillows on the floor and sipped the ice cold vodka.

“Hey what’s this, it isn’t the drugstore stuff that we’ve been drinking?”
“Special treat for a special girl”

They usually only had one drink before dinner but this evening they lingered longer. The Martinis were so good that Rosie had made a second batch and despite the crackers and salmon that they had eaten they were both a little tipsy. Annie rambled on about the new people that she worked with and her displeasure at one of her supervisors and other things that Rosie paid no attention to. Finally Rosie couldn’t put off the inevitable any longer.

“I got a job today”
“What? Why didn’t you tell me earlier?”
“Its just a temporary job, something to get me out of the house until I find the right situation.”
“What is it?” Annie asked wondering why she was being so indirect.
“Its just a clerk in a store, it pays just a little more than minimum wage but it’s not very far away on the bus and the boss seems nice.”
“I thought that you were going to try the galleries downtown. With your knowledge of art you can do a lot better than minimum wage”
“Oh Annie don’t start, I’ll get something better but right now this job will do”
“Rosie, why did you go to all of the trouble to get your degree if you’re not going to use it? You spent a lot of time in college just to settle for minimum wage, why did you do that?”
“Don’t you know why, don’t you really know?”
“No I don’t know and I don’t understand”
“I did it to be with you!”

The room was silent. Annie stared at Rosie and Rosie looked away. Finally Annie spoke,

“Rosie? Rosie, are you crying?”
“Yes”
“Oh Rosie”
She crawled across the floor on unsteady knees and held her friend in her arms.
“Don’t cry Rosie, I’m sorry that I said anything about your job”

That didn’t help. Rosie had held the truth about her feelings for Annie in for so long that after she said the words the emotion flooded out of her.

“Oh Rosie, you know that I care for you and that I didn’t want to be apart after college. I guess that I knew that you felt that way too. It’s ok to cry.”

Rosie continued to sob and Annie continued to hold and comfort her for a long time. Finally Rosie went into the bathroom, blew her nose and washed her face. When she

emerged she tried to look cheerful but failed. She sat on the floor next to Annie and took a big gulp from the vodka bottle. She handed it to Annie who took a smaller sip while she waited for Rosie to say something.

“I’m not queer, I’m not attracted to other women and I don’t get anything out of seeing naked titties in Playboy magazine. I just like you so much, no that’s not right. I just love you so much that I want to be with you all of the time. When we spent that summer apart my mom finally asked me if I had a crush on you. I guess that I talked about you all of the time, anyway, I told her that I didn’t but I knew that I did. I still do”

“Its gay or lesbian not queer, I love you too Rosie, I guess that I always saw myself as married with a family and you as my best friend. Honey, are you attracted to men at all?”

“Not much but I guess I could be , I was when I was sixteen but I always had a close girlfriend to share things with. The guy in high school was such a jerk that I didn’t look any farther.”

Annie tried to lighten the conversation,

“Ok Rosie, I declare that I love you and I want you to be my best friend for life, what do you say?”

“Annie, I love you and I want you to be my best friend for life. You can kiss me now”

“What kind of kiss, should I put my tongue in your mouth?”

“No just one of your momma kisses that you are so generous with”

Annie kissed her cheek and forehead and then her lips. The kiss was slightly more than her momma kiss and she wanted it to show how close she felt. After that they sat against each other feeling emotionally drained. Annie finally asked

“What are we doing for dinner?”

“Will you take care of it, I had a hard day”

“Looking for a job?”

“Yes”

“How many places do you call on?”

“Just one”

“Poor baby”

There was a difference between them after that. It was as if neither had anything to hide. They were much more casual about seeing the other naked. They kiss more without the fear of giving the other the wrong impression, and they were much more open about talking about their feelings. There were funny little things, like when Annie had a few drinks she used more bad language. She began to refer to her supervisor at work as ‘that bitch’. In the past, Rosie had refrained from touching Annie too much, but now she touched her as much as she liked.

Rosie was enjoying her job and she was constantly entertained by Karma. She wanted Annie to meet her so she invited the woman to come for dinner.

“You know Rosie, I don’t get out very much and I don’t like to walk in this neighborhood after dark. Why don’t you have your sister come here after work? We can snack on some munchies and you can be on the bus by eight.”

Annie liked the idea of getting out and she wanted to meet this person that Rosie talked so much about. She thought that she could make the eight-stop bus trip in about forty minutes so she would be there before six. Rosie told her the shop would be closed but to rang at the side door and Karma would buzz her in.

The shop was on the ground floor of an old five story building. The second, third and fourth floor were occupied by offices but the fifth floor was a single apartment. Karma called it the penthouse. From the apartment, there was a door that led to the roof and it was here that the women met to visit that night.

Karma provided cheese, crackers and a good white wine. She was, by far, the most bazaar person that Annie had ever met. She entertained them with stories of the hippy days in San Francisco and the soon-to-be-famous people that she had met.

“My problem is that when I try to remember what we did and who was there it gets all mixed up in my head. I think that I was at Woodstock in ’69 but all of those outdoor concerts in the rain look pretty much alike, I do remember seeing Jimi Hendrix play so maybe I was there.

I came here in ’61, I think, and by ’64 it was getting real crowded. Someone got the idea that we should go live in the woods and raise our own food and live by our own rules. Well I was ready for whatever so a bunch of us got an old MTA bus and went to Montana. We were going to live like the pioneers and I guess that we did for a while. I don’t know where we found this place but it was out in a canyon and there were already lots of people there before us.

The weather was good and we slept outside. There was always a warm sleeping bag for me to crawl into. There was plenty of weed and we screwed anyone that was willing. I remember swimming in a little creek and laying in the sun and getting the worst sunburn of my life. You know when your naked you don’t have much defense against anything. We thought that it would last forever but in October, winter arrived and we hit the road back to the Hait”

Karma took a little metal box from her Mumu and rolled herself a marijuana cigarette.

“Help your self, it’s pretty good stuff”

Annie and Rosie looked at each other. They had never tried it although it was common in the dorm at college.

“We probably shouldn’t, we might have trouble finding the bus”

“Suit yourself, take a couple home with you” Karma said knowing that these girls had never smoker it before.

“You know, if a cop caught us on the way home, I’d probably loose my job”

This amused Karma even more.

“Look kids, no San Francisco cop is going to bother with a couple of joints. They spend their time on the bad stuff like cocaine and heroin, the stuff that hurts people. The two things that they leave alone are pot and hookers.”

“Hookers? You mean prostitutes. I haven’t seen any in our neighborhood”

“Do you know what they look like?”

“Sure, I guess, don’t they wear skimpy clothes with fishnet stockings?” Annie said.

Again Karma laughed,

“Do I look like a hooker?”

“Oh no, not at all”

“I came to the City when I was fifteen, how do you think that I lived with no money?”

“Did you ...?”

“Yes dear, I had to eat and buy dope and stuff. I was sleeping with a different hippy guy every night and I didn’t think that earning a month’s rent from some tourist who wanted a young hippy girl could do any harm. I always picked the old, fat guys that reminded my of my step dad. That way I felt like I was getting even with him. I did it for a year and then some nice old fat guy hurt me. It could have been really bad so I got a real job. Rosie, I took the job that you have now, right here in what’s my shop now.”

“Karma, I’d like to take some pot home it that’s ok” Rosie said.

Karma went into the apartment and came back with a little silver and turquoise box.

“Here’s everything that you need, just don’t over do it. Remember that it lasts for a long time and you don’t want to drive for a while”

When they got off of the bus, they stopped by McDonalds and took home burgers and fries. They were still feeling a little giddy from the wine and the excitement of their visit with a real San Francisco hippy.

They went straight to the bedroom to change out of their work clothes, Rosie told Annie that she had a surprise for her and took two tie-dyed mumus out of her big handbag.

“Surprise! What do you think of these” Rosie said.

“Oh you shouldn’t have but they are perfect for this evening. Do you feel a little like a hippy now?”

They undressed and tossed their clothes on the floor, each helped the other slip into the tent-like dress and they twirled around the room and laughed. While Annie put the burgers onto paper plates, Rosie lit candles and as another surprise, a small incense burner.

Annie asked if Rosie wanted a martini with dinner and her friend laughed.

“No Annie, I don’t want vodka, what else might we have?”

“Well, there’s a little wine in the fridge” she said with a twinkle in her eye.

“No, I don’t want any wine, anything else?”

“Well, I might just have a little pot in my purse, would you like that?”

While giggling they fumbled through rolling a fat joint and contemplated how to smoke it.

“Did you notice how Karma sucked it deep and held it? It’s not like a cigarette. She smoked it right down to nothing.” Annie said.

“I tried to smoke in high school and all I did was cough and get dizzy.”

“Ok let’s take it easy at first”

They lit the joint and Rosie took a small puff.

“No you have to take it in, you blew it out right away, let me try”

Annie took a small puff and sucked it down into her lungs. She fought the urge to cough and she was able to hold her breath for a half a minute.

“Do you feel anything?”

“Not yet, now you try it”

Over the next few minutes, they traded the joint back and forth until it was gone. Finally they sat on the floor together and waited for something to happen.

“Do you feel anything?” Annie asked.

“No, nothing”

“Are you sure?”

“Sure I’m sure”

“Then why are you talking so loud”

“I’m not talking loud but turn the stereo up, I can hardly hear it”

“It’s too loud now, this stuff isn’t working. Will you get us some vodka?” Annie whispered.

“Can you get it, honey? It’s too far for me. Oh listen to the music, isn’t it pretty, come on, dance with me”

The Jones sisters held each other and danced around the room. Annie tripped on the hem of her mumu and Rosie had to hold her up. Finally they collapsed onto the pile of pillows and lay together.

“I think that it’s working” Rosie said.

“Do you think that we should smoke another one?”

“No, Karma said that it lasted a long time, let’s just see what happens”

They snuggled together on the pillows and talked and laughed and sang songs with the radio. Eventually the candle burnt out and they finally went to bed. They kissed goodnight several times, not because of any passion but because they couldn’t remember if they had already done it.

The Saturday morning sun was streaming through the window when Annie finally woke. She was cuddled tight against Rosie and to her shock, they were both nude. They had slept together for four years and they had never been naked in bed before. She lay there for a minute recalling the evening. She had been nicely high and she remembered a strong feeling of well-being. She couldn't remember when she had had a more pleasant time. Karma was right about pot leaving no hangover. She felt great and she would feel better if she could get some clothes on before Rosie woke up.

Looking around the room she saw their work clothes scattered about and the two muumuus were lying near the bed. It was out of character for both of them to be so untidy. Normally everything was folded and put away. She didn't remember which of the tent-like dresses that she had worn so she picked up the first one and took it to the bathroom.

She quickly brushed and showered and slipped her hippy dress over her head. When she went into the kitchen, Rosie was making coffee. They did their usual good morning momma kiss and Annie went to the door looking for the newspaper. When she sat at the little table Rosie poured her a cup of coffee.

"Did you sleep well?" Annie asked Rosie.

"Very well thank you but I do have a couple of questions"

"Yes" Annie said sweetly.

"Why are you wearing my dress and did you ravage me last night?"

"Ravage you! What gives you that idea?"

"Well I woke up alone and my nightgown, which I'm sure I put on, was gone. The only plausible explanation is that you had your way with me and then left me. Is there someone else?"

Annie tried to look at her with a straight face. Rosie acted sincere about her question but finally broke down into laughter.

"How do you feel honey" Annie really asked

"I feel good, wasn't that a different experience. I remember everything. I remember the cuddling and the dancing. You're not very good at singing along with the radio. You keep making up your own words. Did you wear a nightgown? I thought that I put mine on but maybe I dreamed it"

"Neither of us wore anything. When I woke, you were behind me with your arms around me with your head on my shoulder and I won't say where your hands were"

Rosie laughed,

"Well it's not like you haven't been felt up before ... oh my god, you probably haven't been felt up before, oh Annie, I'm sorry"

"You are a silly, silly girl" she said smiling.

Summer turned into a wet fall that led to a cold, wet winter. Annie enjoyed her job and she had met several new people. A single guy that she worked with had asked her on a

dinner date but nothing came of it. An obviously gay girl had paid her a lot of attention for a while but she had lost interest when Annie remained polite but not interested.

Rosie still talked about looking for an art related job but she really liked her job with Karma. She began to dress the part of a hippy for her job but she changed her clothes at work and was her normal, Iowa girl, the rest of the time. She was asked on dates by several guys but they had all looked like junkies to her. It was one thing to smoke a joint with Annie and another to do it with some guy that she didn't really know.

Once, Karma gave her a couple of Ecstasy pills to share with Annie. That night, they talked about it but they had decided not to move into heavier drugs. They both felt that marijuana was harmless and they didn't want to take any chances.

Christmas brought cold and clear weather and the city looked beautiful. They walked the streets at night, window shopping and being dazzled by the lights. Somehow even their tiny apartment felt like a cozy home to them.

New Years day was a Friday giving Annie a three day weekend. Rosie asked Karma for a couple of days off and the girls drove up the coast and found a room in dilapidated hotel in a little fishing village. It was cold and the wind was blowing spray from the ocean across the beach and against the window in their room.

Late in the afternoon, they bundled up and walked two hundred yards along the sea front to a weather-beaten café for dinner. Inside it was warm and cheerful and a glass of California white wine made the evening look promising. Dinner was fish that was so fresh that it had been swimming in the freezing ocean that morning. Of course the dinner called for more wine and desert needed more wine and then an after dinner brandy.

When they finally made their way towards their hotel they were both a little drunk. The sun was gone and the Wendy darkness was a challenge. There were no streetlights to guide them and the path was rough. After Annie nearly fell, Rosie held her hand and tried to keep them both upright.

About halfway back to the hotel they met a man and presumably his wife walking and carrying a flashlight. Just after they had passed, the girls heard the man say something to the woman and the only word that they recognized was 'gay'.

When they were finally back in their room, Annie was irritated.

"You know, it pisses me off that that guy thought we're gay just because we were holding hands. Hell, we could have tripped in a hole of something. We didn't have the advantage of his flashlight."

"Oh Annie, just let it go"

"It's a California thing, people in Iowa don't call girls gay because they hold hands. Hell, I hold hands with my mom when the street is rough?"

While Annie continued to rant, they both undressed and put on nightgowns. Annie kept on even after they were in bed and the lights were off. Rosie really didn't want to talk about it and finally she told Annie,

“Look Annie, tomorrow morning I'll ask the manager if we can switch to a room with twin beds so he won't tell the neighborhood that a couple of San Francisco queens are staying at his place”

“Ok Rosie, good night, love you”

“I love you too, in a sisterly way of course”

Annie did her job and except for her boss, who she disliked, she found the staff very friendly. There were three women that she worked with everyday and they asked her to join them at Happy Hour after work on Friday night.

The school was in a much nicer neighborhood than the girls apartment and they met at a pleasant café that set in a grove of trees. Two the women were married to business men who worked in the City. The other was a single girl about Annie's age who talked mostly about her various boyfriends. On several occasions she had seen Gail dropped off for work by some man and she was wearing the clothes that she had worn the day before.

The married women had both gone to college in the area and it was apparent that they were now living in very nice neighborhoods. Gail lived in an apartment not far from Annie. She was familiar with all of the clubs and the swinging night spots. Annie entertained the girls with her story about the Venus Club where she and Rosie had gone to the gay bar. Gail laughed and said that she often went there with some friends and she had often seen tourists shocked by what they saw.

A few days later Annie ate her lunch with Gail on the patio behind the library.

“Gail, you said the other night that you often went to the Venus club, I would have thought that with your boyfriend that it wouldn't have been your kind of place?”

“Anne, you are a hick from the sticks, you can't live in San Francisco without having gay friends, I'm more comfortable there with them than they would be at the clubs where I go with my boyfriends.”

“Good point, I don't have any gay friends but I guess that if I live here long enough I'll meet some”

“Come with me some night, you'll like my friends, They're all well educated urban women and I think that you'll like them. Since they will know that your straight, no one will hit on you, well maybe just a little”

On Thursday Gail asked Annie if her sister would like to join them for happy hour. Annie explained that Rosie would be a little late because she would have to ride the bus from the bay.

When Rosie arrived the others had already had two glasses of wine and had eaten all of the free snacks. The two married women chatted with her for a few minutes then explained that they had to get home. Gail suggested that since Rosie hadn't eaten that they go to a place that she knew near the beach. She said that they had a seafood special and a nice view. The problem of transportation was quickly solved when Gail asked the bartender to call them a cab.

With a view of the ocean and a dinner of crab and pasta, the girls chatted and laughed on the open-air deck. Rosie was two glasses of wine behind the other two and they weren't slowing down.

"Gail it sounds like you have been everywhere and know everyone in the City"

"Not everywhere or everyone but I have seen a lot. There are some wonderful and some very bazaar things in this town. I have an idea, just how adventuresome are you two?"

Annie was slurring her words just a little,

"Hey girl, we're here for the ride, we may blush but we want to see everything, right sister dear?"

"That's right sister dear, whatever it is, bring it on"

Gail wasn't sure if she was being kidded or not but she made her proposal anyway.

"Do you know anything about the occult?"

"Do you mean witches and magic and stuff?" Rosie asked.

"Something like that, have you heard of Wickin?"

"I read a little in a comparative religion class in school. Isn't it the religion practiced by witches? They worship nature and don't believe in hurting anything, even insects and they heal illnesses with herbs."

"Yes, that's the basics but there are lots of interpretations of Wickin. Would you two be interested in seeing a Wickin ritual?"

"Gail, are you a witch?"

"Some might think so but not that kind of witch. A friend took me to ceremony and I thought that it was interesting and I guarantee that it won't be what you think it is. I have to ask one more question, are you pretty broadminded about sex and stuff"

Rosie answered immediately,

"Just watching right, we don't have to take part do we?"

"Just watching"

Gail had the cab driver drop the girls off at their apartment and said she would be back to get them at 11:30. She said that everything that was done in Wickin happened at midnight.

"So what do we wear to a witch hunt?" Rosie said laughing.

"I don't know, dressy dress I guess, we wouldn't want to offend the witches"

"For sure, they might put a curse on you and grow a wart on your nose, let's smoke a joint before we go"

"What's with you, wine, crab and now pot?"

“I don’t know, I feel all excited, like I’m doing something really naughty. You said that Gail is straight and has lots of boyfriends, right?”

“That’s what she says”

“Well she gave me the look. She licked her lips and looked right at my size 33-B padded bra. She may have boyfriends but I’ll bet she swings both ways”

“Rosemary Jones, where do you get these ideas, ever since that gay girl smiled at you on our vacation, you have been imagining all sorts of things.”

“Oh sure, just like I imagined that you got me high then stripped me naked and did dirty things to me while I was asleep”

“I did dirty things to you? Who was being felt up when the sun came up?”

“I have no knowledge of that, where’s the matches, we need to get this joint smoked”

The taxi took them to a café in North Beach. They didn’t sit at a table but walked through to the back and across the alley. They recognized the building as a school of some kind. “It’s a day-care that rents its meeting room at night.” Gail explained.

The hall into the meeting room was dimly lit and there were many people standing and chatting. They hadn’t waited long when a gong gently sounded and people filled into the room. It was very dark and they found seats in folding chairs along the wall. When every one was seated, the door closed and it was pitch black.

A match was struck and a single candle was lit. In the dim light they could see a person dressed all in black was holding the candle and she began to chant something in a low voice. More candles were lit and they could make out a circle of chanting women in black but neither girl could quite make out what they were saying.

Suddenly a bright spotlight illuminated a woman in the center of the room. She was all in white and she had her arms raised towards the ceiling or the sky or towards god or something. She gave what sounded like a prayer to the earth mother asking for those who were worthy to come forward. From the darkness, four more women in white appeared. There were other figures in the room that were all in black and in the single spotlight they appeared to be nearly invisible.

The priestess or whatever she was drew a pentagram on the floor and recited something that the girls couldn’t understand. There was a flurry of the black dress figures around those who were worthy and just as Rosie started to whisper something in Annie’s ear, there were four nude girls standing in the circle. Their white robes were gone. Annie drew in her breath and held Rosie’s hand. On her other side she felt Gail’s hand resting on her shoulder.

The nude girls stood with their arms raised to the sky as the priestess said her incantation. With a flurry of black figures the nude girls were wearing long black skirts. This went on until they were completely dressed in black. Finally they all came together in the center in what looked like a group hug. Annie hadn’t noticed before but the room was filled with the smell of incense and marijuana.

Back out on the street, Gail seemed very excited. It was almost like she was aroused. She hailed a cab and asked the girls if they were ready for the final part of the ceremony. Annie seemed a little dubious but Rosie said that they were ready for anything.

The cab took them to a house in china town. When they entered they saw that there were about fifteen young women. They didn't greet each other but went straight into a large living room that was devoid of furniture. The floor was covered with pillows and in the center of the room was what looked like a small alter. The smell of incense was heavy in the air and as soon as everyone was seated on the pillows the lights were dimmed to near darkness. Again Annie and Rosie sat close together and held hands. This time Gail sat on the other side of Rosie and had her hand on her shoulder. Rosie thought that it was to reassure her but it seemed a little intimate.

The Priestess from the other ceremony walked through the seated people with a little box and appeared to be giving communion. Each woman would look up and open her mouth. The priestess would say something and put a small wafer on the girls tongue. After Annie and Rosie received theirs they sat there wondering what was coming next.

Annie realized that the dim light in the room was changing color. It looked like a rainbow and it was becoming very bright. She looked at Rosie and was surprised at how close she was. It was if Annie had her face an inch away from her friends. From somewhere Gail came very near her face and she kissed her. Annie tried to give her a momma kiss but it was much more than that. After a while nothing made any sense, shapes and colors merged into a swirl of light.

Rosie's experience was as intense but it wasn't like her friends. She saw strange and frightening figures around her. She tried to hold onto Annie for protection but something pulled her away. She recognized Gail who was helping her. She clung to Gail who was taking her someplace. She recognized a boy from her third grade class. He had wanted to play doctor with her but she had run away. Suddenly she was at her senior prom and she was dancing with the boy that had brought her. Then they were in the backseat of his car and he was taking her panties off. After that it was all lights and sounds and then black-black-black.

The sun streaming through the bedroom window woke Annie. For a minute she didn't know where she was but she recognized the ceiling and she could hear Rosie breathing beside her. She was surprised to find that she was still dressed from the night before. She has a quick, pleasant memory of waking up with Rosie cuddling her and finding that they were both nude but now she looked and saw that Rosie was dressed also.

She went into the bathroom and tried to take stock of what was happening. She was still feeling a little foggy but she didn't have a hang-over but one look in the mirror confirmed her suspicions that she looked like hell.

She stripped all of her clothes and leaving them on the floor she put on her yellow kimono and went to the kitchen. While she was making coffee she heard a strange sound from the bedroom. She called to Rosie and got no answer. She rushed into the room and saw Rosie standing in front of the full length mirror. She had on her blouse but nothing else. She was sobbing and looking in the mirror. There was blood on the insides of both legs and there were ugly bruises on both arms where someone had held her.

“Oh Rosie what’s happened? Have you started your period?”

Rosie sobbed harder and reached for Annie. She clung to her and cried. Finally she made some sense.

“Oh Annie, I’ve been raped”

Rex – the sixties and seventies.

Growing up in Rattlesnake Canyon was a wonderful experience for Rex, there was a stream to swim in, woods to explore and in the winter there was an icy road to fly down on his sled.

If there was any drawback, it was the lack of neighborhood kids to play with. There were a few who lived at what his dad called the Hippy Camp which was farther up the canyon. When the road was clear, they would walk or ride bicycles to school and he would join them. In the summer, there were more kids at the camp but his dad didn't want him hanging around them. Rex asked why but he never got a good answer.

“Karl, why don't you let him go up there to play, its lonesome here on his own”
“Beth, you remember what those people are like, I don't want him seeing stuff like that”
“Oh Karl, this isn't San Francisco in 1966 and people don't have sex on the grass anymore. It wouldn't hurt him to have more friends”

Reluctantly, Karl let his son spend time at the camp but he told him not to smoke anything or to take any pills.

What Rex found were small families growing vegetables and reading a lot. When he was ten he made friends with a boy his age and they had a wonderful summer together. Karl and Beth were curious about the boy's family and they asked Rex to find out more about them. They were very surprised to learn that the boy's mom was an elementary schoolteacher and his dad was working on his PHD.

They asked their son if he ever saw anyone naked.
“Bobby and I swim naked sometimes when no ones around.”
“Did you see any naked adults?”
“No, they wear bathing suits just like you and mom”

When Rex was fourteen he became very interested in airplanes and his dad got him a part-time job gassing planes. The boy saved his earnings and asked if he could take flying lessons. He made his first solo flight on his seventeenth birthday and had his license a month later.

When He graduated for high school, His dad got him a job as an aircraft mechanic's helper and told him that if he wanted to, he could have his A&E license in a couple of years.

Rex continued building his flying hours and by the time that he was twenty one, he had a commercial license and was flying checks and documents from the local bank to their headquarters in Great Falls. He continued working with his dad and married Molly, his high school sweetheart.

After living in an apartment for a year, the Hippy Camp came onto the real estate market. Rex jumped at the chance to buy it and with a loan from his dad, he and his new wife became the new owners of a mortgage for a house in Rattlesnake canyon. There was one situation to tend to with the new property. There were three bunk houses on the place that were being rented to hunters and fishermen and there were several people and a few children living here and paying nominal rent. Several of the ranch hands and the guest house manager had lived on the property for years and he wasn't sure if they were earning their keep or they had just been good friends of the previous owner.

At first Rex thought that he would evict them all and start fresh but Molly asked him to let them stay, at least for a while. As a girl she had lived in one of the house until her parents married and moved to a place of their own and she felt a connection to the left-over's from the flower-child years.

Nan Rivers

Nan was nervous as she waited in her small room behind the ranch office. She was waiting for her interview with the new owner and she was sure that he was going to ask her to leave. She had seen Mr. Hamilton several times as he and his wife looked over the property but she hadn't spoke to him. They seemed friendly enough when they nodded or waved but now that they had moved into the big house, they were making changes.

Jack Bernard had been foreman of the ranch for over twenty years and this morning he had been sent on his way. Ramón was in talking to the boss now and she knew that he was very nervous. She didn't know what she would do if Ramón left or if she wasn't wanted. She had been here so long that she couldn't think of life anywhere else.

Nan was born in Oklahoma at the start of the great depression. She was the oldest of two girls born to a prosperous farmer but the dust bowl years took the farm and when she was six years old, a car wreck took her parents. Since there was no other family to care for the girls, they found their way to a Tulsa orphanage.

The Our Lady of Peace School for Girls sounded like a nice place for a girl to grow up but nothing could have been farther from the truth. The children were alternately fed a diet of strong Catholic dogma mixed with mental abuse and brutal punishment. The food was so poor that by the time she was nine she weighed just a few pounds more then when she was six.

She was separated from her sister in 1942 when the O.L.P. school was closed by the state and all of the girls went into the Tulsa foster care system. In 1948, on her eighteenth birthday, she was set free from the system and immediately searched for her sister. She was told that she could be the foster parent for the sixteen year old if she had a job and a place to live or if she was married to a responsible man. Within six months she was married to a twenty-one year old rookie fireman and she was united with Joyce.

Life might have been good to her after a childhood of torment but it didn't work out that way. At first her husband was caring and thoughtful but his work seemed to change him. Not only did he sleep at the firehouse half of the time but he went out with his co-workers most nights when he was home. It became very important for him to show what a 'Man' he was and Nan suffered from that.

Joyce living with them became a problem when her husband started paying too much attention to the younger girl and he often made comments about one woman not being enough for him. Her marriage to this 'real man' ended one night when he tore her sisters blouse in what he described as a friendly wrestling match and she claimed was a sexual attack and had bruises on her breasts to prove it. The girls packed and left with the money that Nan cleaned out of the joint checking account and that very day they were on a Greyhound bus to California.

With no plan in mind they landed in Oakland and almost immediately found work. Joyce's good looks got her a job as a waitress-barmaid in a country and western bar and Nan found work as secretary-clerk-errand runner in the office of a steamship company. Both sisters enjoyed the social life in their new hometown and Nan applied for an annulment from her husband and since he already had found a replacement for her, he offered no objections.

Sister Joyce dated a rooky policeman and she introduced Nan to his best friend and partner. They were married in a double ceremony on Valentines day, 1951 and again, life looked good to them. It never occurred to either girl that policemen and firemen might have the same outlook on life.

Things were good for a while for the newlywed Mrs. Daniel Rivers and with the cheap houses that were available, both sisters soon had their own home. Joyce became pregnant and was the happy mother of a baby girl. Despite her trying, no children blessed Nan's home.

By 1960, Dan had become bitter about almost everything that wasn't to do with the police. He had developed an attitude that was common among policemen, that it was "us against them". If you weren't a cop then you were probably a dirt-bag. He started drinking heavily, often while on duty and he begin going out at night with no explanation. At first Nan thought that he might have a girlfriend but she decided that he was too bitter to be social. She went through his pockets and on more than one occasion she found way too much money. The truth finally dawned on her that he was a dirty cop.

She tried to talk to him but his reaction was to hit her. One night , in a rage, he beat her so badly that she was black and blue for weeks. She couldn't call the cops because he was the cops and they took care of their own. This went on for a year and then, in the spring of 1963, she packed a bag and left. She took the owners registration to her two year old Volkswagen and stopped by the bank and withdrew all of the cash. She thought that she might never be back and she wanted to be prepared.

With no where to go, she went to the Hate Ashberry district of San Francisco and listened to the street music. The hippies were smoking dope and having a great time and a smiling girl with flower's in her hair asked Nan if she was lost. Nan said that she wanted to be lost and the girl laughed. That night Nan slept on her couch while the flower girl made love to a guy that she hadn't known at breakfast that morning.

The next day she waited until after six in the evening when she thought that Dan would be home then she went to a pay phone and called her home number.

"Dan, we need to talk"

"WHERE THE GODDAMNED HELL HAVE YOU BEEN AND WHO'S BED DID YOU SLEEP IN LAST NIGHT!!!"

"Calm down, I spent the night in a hotel"

“Bullshit, I put out a bulletin on you and if you stayed in any hotel in the bay area I would have know it”

That sent a chill through her. If a bulletin was out on her then they would be looking for her car and they would also be checking the airports and bus stations.

“Dan, we can’t go on like this, you can’t beat on me whenever you get pissed at your life. We were so happy for a while, what’s happened to us?”

“Look Nan, we can talk about it at home, where are you now?”

“I can’t come home with you in this mood, I’m afraid of you”

“LISTEN BITCH, GET YOUR ASS HOME RIGHT NOW OR THE NEXT TIME I SEE YOU I’LL RIP YOUR FACE OFF!!!”

Nan hung up the phone. She was terrified that he would find her. She had to get away to somewhere safe but right now she needed to hide. She wanted to just drive away in her car but she knew that would be a bad mistake. Finally she decided to try to put the cops off of her trail. She put the key back in the ignition and turned on the car’s lights. Leaving the drivers door open she walked towards an intersection where she could find a bus. She thought that in this neighborhood, the car would be stolen soon. As she boarded the bus she saw her car race by on it’s way downtown. She had never thought that she would be happy to see her car stolen but it put a smile on her face.

Back in the flower child’s room she found her packing a small bag,

“Hey Nanny we’re going to the country, want to come?”

“Where are you going?”

“I don’t know, somewhere in the mountains, we’re going to live outdoors and grow our own food, it’ll be a blast”

“Is it a commune? I saw something on TV about people like you living in communes”

“Yea I guess, it’s called Hippy Camp and it’s a couple of days drive from here”

“How are you getting there?”

“Pete’s van, there’s room, come on”

Pete’s van was a beat up old VW Microbus. Pete and Slammer were in the front seat and Marcy, the flower child, Ann something and Nan were in the back. They were all singing and laughing and smoking marijuana while Nan slumped down and thought about dying at the hands of her maniac husband.

When they stopped at a K-Mart in Sacramento for a bathroom break and to buy some snacks, Nan called her sister.

“Joyce, its Nan”

“My god Nan, Dan’s been here and he’s acting crazy. What did you do to him?”

“I left him after he beat me for the last time. I tried to talk to him but he’s gone over the edge and I don’t think that it has anything to do with me.”

“Where are you now?”

“I can’t tell you but I’m trying to get somewhere safe. Look Joyce, I really think that he will kill me if he catches me and he has the cops on his side. If anything happens to me, I want you to call the FBI and tell them about this conversation. Don’t call the Oakland police. They’ll just cover everything up. Honey, I’ll call you but not very soon. If you don’t hear from me by Christmas, make that call. I have to go now”
“I love you Nan”

The summer was spent living in tents and raising vegetables in a big garden. Nan tried the marijuana that Marcy liked so much but she didn’t like it. It lasted too long and she felt totally out of control. When the weather turned cold in the fall, the love children went their way back to the coast or home to their regular life’s but Nan had no place to go.

The Hippy Camp started out as a casual invitation by a San Francisco business man to several of his friends. Joe Bonnet had grown up on the family ranch located in a canyon near Redrock Montana. After college he moved to San Francisco and over the years he had been very successful at making money. After his parents were gone he kept the ranch as a summer retreat and left the running of the business to his foreman.

In the fifties he started inviting business associates and friends to come to the ranch in the summer for great trout fishing and easy living. The house only had two bedrooms so the guests camped in tents near the river. His friends started inviting their friends until the camp site has nearly filled the grassy meadow. As the fabric of American society changed in the late fifties, so did the make up of the summer encampment. By 1962, the Hippy Camp was living up to its name.

Joe retired in 1959 and moved home to the ranch where he had no problem with the hippies. He enjoyed the music and the spectacle of the flower children practicing free love. He charged each camper a modest fee that he spent on providing portable outhouses and on a general cleanup of the property after the fall evacuation.

This year, was different. A woman who was a little too old to be a hippy came to him with a request.

“Mr. Bonnet, can I stay here over the winter. I really don’t want to leave.”

“Well hon, I don’t think you realize just how cold it’s going to get. You would freeze to death in that tent.”

Nan looked disappointed.

“I really need to stay somewhere, do you know where I could get a cheap room. I have a little money and I can get a job but I don’t want to live in town”

“Are you running from the law?”

Nan was hesitant to talk but she was desperate to stay hidden so she told him her story leaving out the part about Dan being a cop. Joe looked at her for a while then asked her,

“Are you a junkie Nan?”

“No, I don’t even like the stuff that the kids did here all summer”

“You didn’t smoke dope and screw in the grass beside the creek”

“I tried marijuana once but I didn’t like it and no one asked me to screw”

He laughed at that.

“Ok hon, here’s a proposition, you can decide if it’s an indecent one or not, I was going to get a housekeeper-cook to live here with me. At sixty-seven most women think that I’m harmless but you can decide that for yourself. If you want the job, I’ll give you room and board and some spending money but I have to warn you, if you lie or cheat me or steal things then you’ll be on the next bus out of town. You seem like a nice lady but we don’t know each other yet. So what do you say?”

Nam had a little room of her own where she could get some privacy, read and watch a little TV. She was a conscientious worker who cleaned and cooked and tried to stay busy. Each morning she cooked Mr. Bonnet’s breakfast then washed the dishes while Joe spent much of his day in the upstairs office working on the ranch books. After lunch she took two hours in her room to read or watching TV. Later she tried to make an appealing dinner for her boss but she was always disappointed at how fast he ate. Her two hours in the kitchen meant fifteen minutes for him in the dining room.

After a month he asked a question,

“Nan, why don’t you eat dinner with me in the dining room? I think that it’s silly for you to do all of the cooking and then for you to eat in the kitchen leaving me alone in the other room, how about it?”

“Well, Mr. Bonnet, if you don’t think that it’s an imposition, I would love to”

That night as she served the food, he opened a bottle of wine. She had gone out of her way to fix a special dinner and instead of setting his place at the end of the table, she sat both settings across from each other.

At first they both made polite small talk but as the days wore on, the conversation became more comfortable. Over the years she had been such an avid reader that she could talk on almost any subject. He had lived in San Francisco and he had traveled a great deal. He had been married to the same woman for forty years when she passed away seven years ago.

When the weather got really cold, he offered her a good sheepskin coat and some fur lined boots. Nan was hesitant to take them thinking that they had been his dead wife’s but he put her mind at ease.

“They’re my daughter’s things. She really didn’t like it here and hardly ever wore them. She’s married now and lives in Hawaii. She has a guest house there that they call a Bed

and Breakfast. My son-in-law has a chartered fishing boat. She likes it warm and she'll never use this stuff again."

"Do they have children?" Nan asked

"They've got a house full of them. She didn't marry until she was thirty five and she still had four kids. I go to see them once a year and she wants me to move over there. Maybe I will someday"

Nan felt safe at the ranch but the dread of her husband was always on her mind.

Normally, José Vargas, one of the ranch hands, took her to town on Saturday to shop for groceries but lately Joe Bonnet had assumed that duty. They would often stop for lunch at one of the local diners and, on occasion, if the spirit moved them, they would go to a movie at the Plaza. Joe might have been twice her age but he was a true gentleman and he knew how to treat a lady.

As Christmas neared Nan and Joe were very at ease around each other and he would often touch her arm or put his hand on her shoulder. She developed the habit of kissing him on the cheek at night and she halfway expected some romantic advance from him but he was always polite.

The Saturday before Christmas she asked him to drop her off at K-Mart while he filled the jeep with gas. He offered to come in with her but she sent him to the gas station. As soon as he was gone, she found a pay-phone. She dreaded making the call to her sister because she was afraid that Dan would trace her to Redrock and come looking for her. She was tempted to hang up as the phone rang but she waited for the answer.

"Hello"

"Joyce, it's me"

"Oh Nan, I've been holding my breath waiting for your call. Are you alright?"

"I'm good, is Dan still looking for me?"

"I've got some news for you, I don't know if it's good or bad"

"What?"

"Nan, Dan's dead. He was killed in a shootout last September. You know that you thought that he might be on the 'take', well I guess that he was and him and some drug dealer got into a fight over money and they tried to shoot each other. I don't know all of the details but Jim said that he was dirty and he would have gone to prison if he had lived. Normally you would get his pension but not now, I'm sorry that he's dead if you're sorry and I'm glad if you're glad"

Nan was shocked. She was sorry that the good man that she married was dead but she was glad that the asshole that he had become was gone. She told her sister where she was living and that she was happy here. She said that she might come for a visit next spring but right now she had no plans.

“Nan, Jim says that even if you can’t get Dan’s pension, you can get his Social Security if you’re still married to him.” That thought made Nan smile.

When she met Joe at the curb she leaned over and kissed his cheek.

“What’s that for?” he asked with a smile.

“Oh just because your so nice”

That night, the temperature dropped to eighteen below zero but the furnace kept the house warm, at least until the electricity went off. Joe made a fire in the fireplace and brought in enough wood to last the night. With the living room being the only place in the house with heat, Nan and Joe snuggled up on the couch together.

She felt very secure with him and she felt happy with the great burden of her homicidal husband lifted from her. Their little goodnight kisses led to some serious kissing. He might have been twice her age but he wasn’t dead. It was too cold and too soon for anything more than some intimate touches but that made them both happy.

Joe was struggling with the ranch accounts and when he learned that Nan had bookkeeping experience, he put her to work. It didn’t take her long to see that the ranch foreman had a lot of unsubstantiated expenses. After several hours of work she told her boss that she thought that the foreman was stealing somewhere between \$10,000 and \$20,000 a year from him.

Joe fired the foreman and from that day on, Nan was the business manager of the ranch. Joe wanted to make a paying proposition out of the rental income that the campers provided and he set her to work coming up with a plan. She spent several days on investigation and calculation and then she showed him her ideas.

Her first thoughts were that the overt dope smoking and screwing by the creek would have to go. She believed that the future lay in what Montana did best, trout fishing in the spring and summer, and hunting in the fall. The tents were too messy and brought the wrong kind of guests. They would need indoor accommodations with toilets and some arrangements for cooking meals. She thought that a bunkhouse with private bedrooms and a central kitchen and laundry room would give them a good return on an investment.

Joe had no objections but he wanted to know how she planned to discourage the hippies from coming. She had been troubled by this problem and her best suggestion was for someone to go the Hait next spring and spread the word among the flower children. She knew that some would still turn up and she thought that for the coming year, they should be given a one or two day stay so they could make new plans.

Joe agreed and told her to do whatever it took because he was spending the spring in Hawaii with his daughter and his grandchildren and, like it or not, Nan was in charge.

Some of Nan's first year in charge was good and some was chaos but they all survived. She was successful in converting the business from hippies to sportsmen and a new source that she hadn't considered. There was a steady stream of hikers, bird-watchers, environmentalist, writers, and a few lost souls that like her, had come to be lost, at least for a while.

The rules were strictly enforced. It was fine to have a cold beer or a glass of wine under the giant oak trees as long as it didn't lead to rowdy behavior but it was not ok to smoke a joint or be high on pills. Each guest had to sign a pledge for good behavior. The paper clearly stated that any infringement of Montana law would lead to a meeting with the county sheriff.

The ranch business wasn't part of Nan's domain and the ranch hands lived in their own quarters about a mile up the road. Most of the ranch property lay above the canyon rim and was out of sight of the ranch house. One of the leading hands was Manual Garcia who had worked for Joe Bonnet most of his life. He was married to a pretty girl from northern Mexico and they had a young son named Ramón.

The boy always hung around the ranch house and tried to make himself useful. Nan liked him and would often see that he got some treat from the kitchen. In the fall when he would walk by on his way to the school she would take pity on him and drive him to the bottom of the hill.

As he grew, Nan was his best friend. She was the one that he came to with a cut or a bruise or a bruised ego. She was the one that he confessed his burning love for some little girl when he was fourteen. She was the one to give him a lecture on safe sex when he started driving the pickup and she was the one that he told first when he proposed to his wife. He called her Tia Nan, Aunt Nan and he loved her with all of his heart.

It was her Ramón who was talking to Mr. Hamilton about his future now. She jumped when she heard the door knob turn and was fearful when Ramón stuck his head through the door.

"It's ok Tia. He seems like a nice guy. He offered me the job as foreman. Do you think that I can do it?"

She had a tear in her eye when she hugged the huge man.

"Of course you can, you're the best person for the job and I'm glad for you. Now tell me what he said"

"I'll tell you later Tia, right now he wants to talk to you"

"Do you think that he'll fire me?"

"No Tia, he will love you like I do"

“Come in Mrs. Rivers and have a seat, can I get you anything, water, coffee?”

“Nothing thank you Sir”

“Mrs. Rivers I’ve had the books audited and I’ve looked over some of your suggestions. I’m eager to get started on some of the projects.”

“Does that mean that I’m staying?”

“Well ... yes, you do want to stay don’t you?”

“Did the audit turn up anything?”

“Yes, I want you to talk to the accountant about a couple of the accounts that you charge expenses to, he wants you to expense them in a different way and I don’t understand any of it. Now about these projects ...”

They went over several of her ideas, some of which he supported and a couple of which he rejected. When they were finished he told her about a new enterprise that he was interested in.

“Do you know where Nine Mile Lake is?”

“Somewhere up in the mountains, some of our guests have fished there”

“That’s right, it’s about sixty miles from here and no one really knows why it’s called ‘Nine Mile’ because it’s not nine miles from anywhere. You can only get to it by jeep in late summer because of the snow pack. There isn’t a real road, just a track through the woods but the lake it’s self is a fisherman’s dream.

A guy in Helena owns part of it and he’s built a lodge and flies fishermen up there in a float plane. He’s retiring and he’s offered the place to me. It’s a real paying operation now but with some improvements’ to the lodge and some advertising it could be a gold mine. I want you to go to Helena and look at his books. If they look ok, we’ll fly up to the place and look it over”

When Nan walked out of the back door, Ramón was waiting for her.

“Is it ok, Tia Nan?”

“It’s more the ok, it’s exciting. I have to go to Helena, I haven’t been to a city in a long time, is there anything that you would like me to bring back for you?”

“Just you, Tia. Just you.”

Nan sat nervously beside Rex in the Cessna 185 float plane. Ahead, through a gap in the mountains, she could see the sun shining off of the waters of the blue lake. As they came over the water she could see that Nine Mile Lake was about three miles long and a half mile wide. Three sides were heavily wooded with just a narrow beach. At the shallow end there was a marshy swamp and she could see a moose browsing among the water lilies.

“Who owns that land?” she asked through the headset intercom.

“BLM, bureau of land management, I doubt if anything will ever be built there”

As Rex flew up the lake, he pointed at a pair of black bears on the narrow beach. Nan saw the lodge near the top of the lake where a fast moving stream flowed past and into Nine Mile it’s self. The lodge was not very picturesque, it looked like a pre-fab that had

been hauled in and assembled here. There was a dock for the float plane and a couple of canoes were pulled up onto the rocky beach.

Rex flew over the lodge and about a mile towards the pass he pointed out a large meadow with a dirt landing strip between the trees.

“There’s an old mine in those rock’s and this is where the parts for the pre-fab lodge were flown in. Look in the trees, there’s a jeep parked there. It was driven in here a few years ago and it’s used to bring supplies to the lodge.”

Rex checked the wind direction by looking at the lake and then he lined up to land. Nan was torn by fear and awed by the beauty of the setting. When the floats touched the water just the sound changed but she never felt a thing.

The lodge was functional but it had no charm at all. There was a big living room and kitchen and six very small bedrooms with shared bathroom. Outside there was a rough track that served as the road to the meadow and a couple of hundred yards up the track was a small building that held a generator. It was place far enough from the lodge to hide the noise that it made.

“What do you think Nan?”

“I think that if we market it right, you will make a ton of money”

San Francisco Chronicle

August 2, 1990

More than 100,000 Iraqi soldiers backed up by 700 tanks invaded the Gulf state of Kuwait in the early hours of this morning.

Iraqi forces have established a provisional government and their leader Saddam Hussein has threatened to turn Kuwait city into a "graveyard" if any other country dares to challenge the "take-over by force".

Incirlik Air force Base, Turkey

Lt. Tim Van Dam was setting in his office at Incirlik Air force Base when a sergeant stuck his head in the door.

“Better come look at this sir, something big is happening over in the gulf”

In the outer office, someone had tuned the TV to Armed Forces Network and the banner on the screen carried the news,

“Iraq invades Kuwait”

When Tim walked up to look, his clerk asked in an excited voice,

“What do you think Lt. Are we going to get mixed up in this?”

“I don’t know, I guess that Saddam wasn’t too pleased with the ass-kicking that he got from Iran so he decided to pick on someone smaller”

Rattle Snake Canyon near Redrock Montana.

“Hurry up Rosie, I’m going to be late for work, what are you doing anyway?”

“Just a second, some Arab country just invaded some other Arab country and the news says that the price of oil is going to go up”

“Yea, well the oil companies raise the price if the wind blows from the wrong direction. Remember that embargo when we were kids, my mom waiting in line for hours just to make Exxon richer. I guess we better fill the car while we can still afford it”

A little farther up the canyon

“Good morning Mrs. Hamilton, has your husband left for work yet?”

“Yes Nan, he should be at airport shop by now, give him a call there”

Hamilton Aviation, Redrock Airport.

“Hamilton Aviation, this is Rex”

“It’s Nan Mr. Hamilton. Have you heard the news this morning?”

“No the radio in the truck is stuck on the country music station, what’s up?”

“Iraq has invaded their neighbor and the news guy says that gas prices will go up, I thought that you might want to fill the planes before that happens”

Montana National Guard Armory, Redrock Montana.

“Montana National Guard, Corporal Petes speaking Sir”

“Hey Petes its Hamilton, have you heard anything about this Iraq thing?”

“Naw, nothing Hamilton but your about the tenth guy to call. You know how this bullshit works, the UN will condemn them and the oil companies will screw us again. I’ll let you know if I hear anything”

Little Rock Creek near the Lassen Volcano.

Dave Kelly and his dad were taking a break from their morning's trout fishing. They had already caught and released several fat rainbows and now the sun was hot and high and they were sitting in the lush grass under a tree. Silently they watched two deer grazing in the meadow when something spooked them and they bounded off into the forest.

"So Dave, are you excited about Berkley?"

"Aw you know pops, a school's a school"

"Oh sure. If that's true why did you camp by the mailbox waiting for their letter?"

"Well, I applied to four schools and San Francisco State was the only acceptance that I had. I really wanted Stanford but they didn't want me. Cal Berkley and UCLA were the only chances that I had left. I had only applied at SFS as a fall back in case the others turned me down."

"I'm glad that you're not going to UCLA, there are too many weirdo's down south."

"Sure dad, nice advice from a guy who grew up wearing love beads and listening to the Grateful Dead".

War - September 1990

If Lt. T. Van Dam had any thoughts about the glories of war he had long since lost them. He was trying to read while the desert was trying to devour his tent. The sand had been blowing for days and he had no reason to think that it wouldn't be blowing for the rest of his life. Just to kill the monotony, he periodically checked the HumVee parked just outside to see how much of the paint had been blasted away.

His tent mate, Lt. Tom Rollins, had surrendered to the near terminal boredom and had escaped into an almost endless sleep. At least tomorrow was to bring some activity although he wasn't sure how much. He had been summoned to the commander's tent for reasons unknown but anything was better than what he was doing.

The morning had brought a brief respite to the howling wind when it had died to just a gale but some change was better than no change. When he went outside the visibility had improved enough for him to see that a new unit had pitched tents on the edge of the camp. Checking his watch he made sure that he would arrive at the unit commanders command tent at exactly 0800 hours.

As Tim trudged through the sun he met a soldier from the new encamping,

"Hey sarge, what unit is that?"

The soldier saluted.

"We don't salute up here, one of us might get shot"

"Sorry sir, we're the Montana National Guard and we're just off the boat"

In the colonel's outer office, Tim made an effort to brush the dust off of his uniform and boots. Just then the door opened and he was called into the office.

"Come in Lieutenant, I promise that you would be a squad leader and I've finally found your squad. Sit down and I'll give you the details."

Tim's squad would look for evidence of any chemical or biological activities by the Iraqi's. He was assigned two Sergeants from the Montana National Guard to help him. These men were trained in chemical and biological warfare and they would provide the technical expertise that was needed. He was also getting four soldiers to provide security for the team and to do any other jobs that the Lieutenant might need. His equipment included a 6x6 truck, two HumVee's, three tents, communication equipment and what ever rations that were required. Did the Lieutenant have any questions?

"Sir, what about chemical and biological detection gear?"

"Your Sergeants will bring what you need. Now, see the first sergeant and he will give you your call signs, radio frequencies and the chain of command. You will receive orders from headquarters daily if needed."

Tim was a little overwhelmed by the scope of his assignment and he hoped that he had enough men to complete his task. After the first sergeant gave him the necessary information, he took him outside to introduce him to his squad.

One of Tim's men was a Montana National Guard Sergeant named Rex Hamilton. He was easy going and seemed to really know his stuff. It was obvious that he was glad to be here and he thought his country was doing the right thing. During their training activity Tim often rode in the HumVee with him.

As a West Point graduate, he instinctively looked down on what he perceived to be poorly trained National Guard troops but after he had worked with them for a while he came to like their easy going manor. In general, they were respectful of the regular officers but they certainly were not awed by rank. They were polite but often avoided saying 'sir' by referring to an officer's rank. 'Yes Major' was far more common than 'Yes sir'. Tim was a little put off by his men calling him 'Lt' instead of Lieutenant but he eventually got over it.

For four long, dusty, boring months Tim and his men tried to stay busy if nothing else then to maintain their sanity and then finally in February the generals turned the army and marines loose and they ran over the vaunted Iraqi army. While the fighting lasted less than four days, Tim's unit was safely in the rear waiting to be called into action. The call never came.

Several days after the fighting stopped, they were sent into Iraq to test destroyed tanks and artillery for any traces of poison gas. Tim, Sergeant May and two soldiers took one HumVee and Rex and the other two guys took another. They spent all day for three days driving from one burned out tank and quickly checking it with gas sensors. They saw a lot of dead Iraqis but found no chemical or biological weapons. At night they would meet and camp on the open desert.

On the fourth day the army found a huge ammunition dump near the Qwi pass. The call on the radio said that there were crates with biohazard markings on them. The unit was excited to actually get to see something that they were trained for and was just about ready to get underway when another call came in. The Air Force reported a destroyed truck about 20 miles north of Qui that had some suspicious containers on it. They wanted Tim to take a look.

Tim and Rex studied the map,

"Ok Sarge, we're here and Qwi's there. The truck is up here but the only way to get to it is to bypass these hills. I want you to check the truck and then meet us at camp five. Lets see, it's nearly noon now, it'll be dark before you get to the truck so camp with the tank guys tonight and get a full tank of gas. Check out the truck and meet us in two nights in Dirt Town."

They marked both maps and verified their radio frequencies. Rex was disappointed but he did what he was told. With the war over he knew that he would be home soon and he wanted at least one story to tell the guys at the VFW hall.

It was late in the day when Tim got to the ammo dump at Qwi. He sent Sergeant May to check one bunker while he checked another. While looking through crates of gas canisters Tim found something that interested him. There was a box filled with small, metal tubes that were about the size of a short cigar. In fact, they looked like the tubes that were used to pack expensive cigars. The only marking that he could see was 'B-271' on each tube. He put several in his jacket pockets meaning to have Rex look them up in his CB reference book and then he looked at the other crates.

His thoughts were interrupted by a siren and a loudspeaker warning all personnel to clear the area. An MP came by and shouted for him to get well away because they were going to destroy the dump. May and the others picked him up in the HumVee and they made their way to a temporary camp about four miles away.

That evening he sat with several officers drinking cokes and watched the dump go up in flames. They cheered at the fireworks and lamented that war in a museum country didn't allow cold beer. The last rays of the sun turned the sky red from the smoke of the burning dump. The next morning, his tent was covered with a layer of black ash but he gave it no thought. He had no idea that the ash would change his and thousands of others lives.

Rex had driven all afternoon and by dark he arrived at temporary camp that had been setup by an armored brigade. He found a friendly National Guard Sergeant that filled his HumVee with gas and pointed out a portable kitchen. He and his two guys camped in the dirt just like they had for the last four months and that night all they talked about was going home.

The next morning they found the truck but Rex didn't like its location. They had seen several Iraqi soldiers that morning and these guys weren't interested in surrendering. As Rex's HumVee approached them they disappeared into the scrub. He didn't like the idea of being ambushed by some hungry deserter.

The truck was in a little gully with mounds and rocks around it. If he took both of his guys down there with him, they could easily be jumped by some of these Iraqi's. He decided to put them on top of the highest rock where they could watch him and each other.

With his riflemen in place he eased the HumVee down the gully and stopped next to the burned out truck. His sensors showed no signs of gas but he decided to take a quick look around. The rear of the truck bed was a mass of melted metal boxes but the cab was still intact. A look inside confirmed that the driver hadn't survived.

When he walked around the other side of the truck, there was a metal box lying in the sand. "Odd" he thought, all of the Iraqi equipment and boxes that he had seen were painted in tan camouflage. This footlocker size box was bright aluminum. Turning it over he saw the markings that caused him to catch his breathe, it said "Bank of Kuwait"

He had heard rumors about guys finding money, gold and jewels but he though that most of it was bull. This box might be nothing more than mortgage papers and bank records. He quickly looked at the burned debris in the back of the truck. He poked through it and found a burned lump of something. He broke the lump open and saw the remains of American \$100 bills.

Rex sat on the box for a minute and thought about what to do. He was an honest man but this might be found money. The Bank of Kuwait had already lost it and except for chance, the box that he was sitting on should have been destroyed. Not knowing exactly what he was going to do he put the box in the back of the HumVee and went to pickup his guys.

Camp 5, Dirt City to its residents, was full of activity when Rex drove in. There were many trucks loading cargo and some tents had already been taken down. He stopped off at the Montana National Guard headquarters tent and was greeted with they news that they were going home. They had to get all of there gear, including their tents onto the trucks by 1700 hours and buses would take them south that evening.

When Rex found Tim, he too had orders to leave. They chatted for a few minutes, exchanged phone numbers and mail addresses, shook hands, saluted and went there separate ways.

Back in the unit tent, Rex thought about the box in the HumVee. He was torn between the classic dilemma of fear and greed. Finally, he broke the lock off of the Bank box and looked inside. It was filled with stacks of \$100 bills. Rex was a little surprised to find that they were used and the serial numbered weren't in order. Without pondering any longer he emptied a crate of gas masks and filled it with the money. He took the gas masks and the Bank box to the HumVee and drove to the disposal dump. A mechanical ditch digger was cutting an eight foot deep trench into the sand. All of the gear that wasn't being taken home was tossed into the trench and a bull dozer was filling it in. He tossed in the Bank box and masks and watched them disappear under eight feet of Saudi dirt.

A few days later, a pallet of boxes that were marked Montana National Guard Armory, Redrock Montana was lifted onto a ship that would take them to the states. It would be several months before they would find their way home and Rex would worry for every minute of those months.

Wendy - October 1990

The phone on Nan's desk rang just before five in the afternoon. It was a woman looking for a place to stay and she said she would be there for at least a week. When Nan asked where she was, she said that she was at the truck stop on the interstate. Nan told her that someone would pick her up within a half hour. She called the ranch office to get a driver but there was no answer. She knew that the fall was a busy time for the ranch so she decided to go herself.

Driving down the canyon she was surprised at how much work had been done on the road. The city had annexed the canyon a month before and the old gate was gone. The road was to be paved and to her delight, cable TV was being brought in.

When she arrived at the truck stop, she knew that there was trouble. The woman looked like a junky. Nan had seen a lot of this in the past and she knew a loser when she saw one. To make matters worse, she had a little girl with her along with a small case and a pink back pack. When she spoke to the woman, she saw her eyes were glassy and she thought that she was probably high. Her clothes were dirty and wrinkled and she had the look of a street person about her.

"I sorry but we don't allow any alcohol or narcotics at the ranch"

"I'm not using, I just took some cold medicine"

"I'm sorry, but you'll have to find somewhere else to stay"

The woman's eyes fill with tears and she pleaded with Nan.

"Please take us in for tonight, I'm exhausted and the kid is hungry. I can't go walking the streets in the dark looking for a place to stay. Just for tonight, please, I can pay, please."

Nan knew better but it was dark and cold.

"Just tonight but tomorrow you need to leave"

Back at the bunk house Nan had her sign a registration card and charged her twenty dollars. She told the woman that a driver would be there at eight in the morning to take her to town.

Back in the office she looked at the card, Margaret Summers with an address in Stockton, California. The name seemed so familiar to Nan that she thought that she had heard it before but she couldn't remember where. She called the ranch office and arranged for a driver to be there at eight in the morning.

Nan lay in bed reading just as she had done every night for many years. There was a stack of paperback novels on her nightstand and a box of books on the floor. She was a member of the book-share club at the library and she was addicted to romance novels. She was nearly asleep when she sat up in bed and looked for a box on the floor. She and quickly scanned through several books and found what she was looking for. The fictional heroin of the novel was Margaret Summers from Stockton.

At eight the next morning she dialed Miss Summers room but there was no answer. She was irritated that the woman had been warned that she was leaving at eight and she wasn't cooperating. She walked down the hall and knocked on the door.

"Miss Summers, it's time to go" she called but there was no answer. She could hear the little girl who she thought was about two years old but the woman didn't answer.

After knocking several times she opened the door with her pass key.

"Miss Summers, it's time to leave."

The two year old was playing on the floor with a little doll and she looked at Nan with Angelic eyes while she sang a little song. The woman was lying on the bed, still dressed in the clothes that she had worn the day before. There was a hypodermic needle and a rubber cord lying beside her. Nan knew that she was in big trouble. Checking quickly she found the woman hardly breathing and she knew that it was an overdose.

She called the driver and they got her into the back of the station wagon. Not knowing what to do with the little girl she scooped her up along with her little pink back pack and ran to the ranch quarters on the other side of the barn. She banged on the door of one of the bungalows and asked the girl who answered to watch the little girl for a while. Then she ran to the car and jumped in the back with the unconscious woman and told the driver to get them to the emergency room fast. Before they had reached the bottom of the canyon, the woman grabbed Nan's hand and whispered, "Take care of my baby"

The woman was dead by the time they reached to the hospital. Nan and the driver waited in the lobby while the police were called and soon a young deputy came in. It was Jimmy Brown who had grown up in Redrock and had been fishing many times at the ranch.

The driver spoke little English so Jimmy asked him a few questions in his high school Spanish. Since he knew nothing about the woman, Jimmy questioned Nan. She told him everything, just as it happened but, for some reason, she left out any mention of the little girl. She meant to tell him but memories of her childhood got in her way. She knew that Jimmy would have taken the girl to Child Services and they would have put her in the foster care system until some relative was found. Nam thought that she would tell him later, when they knew who she was.

When they were through, Jimmy followed them back to the ranch and checked her room. He took photos of the needle and rubber cord. He opened her little case and found almost nothing. There was some dirty underwear and a wrinkled blouse. There was no purse and Nan couldn't remember seeing her with a purse. Jimmy had already collected the contents of her pockets which consisted of 84 dollars and some change. She had no identification at all.

"Nan, aren't you required to see her I.D. when she checks in?"

"You know I am Jimmy but it was late and she was only staying the night, am I in trouble?"

“No Nan but do it next time”

When the deputy was gone Nan went to the ranch quarters,

“Thanks Maria, I’ll take her now”

“Who is this girl Nan, I haven’t seen her before?”

“She’s my niece’s girl and she’ll be staying for a few days”

“Was it your niece who died?” Maria said with sadness.

“No, my niece brought her here last night, the woman who died was just a drifter passing through”

Back in Nan’s room, with the angelic little girl playing on the floor, she went through the back pack. There were a couple of pairs of pants and shirts that were still in Wal-Mart packages, several pair of cotton panties and a wrinkled t-shirt and shorts from a good San Francisco Department store. On the T-shirt was a picture of a Peter Pan and Tinkerbelle. There was also a good supply of apples and fruit juice boxes.

Nan sat the girl on her lap and talked to her as she checked her over. Her panties were dry indicating that she was potty-trained. Her clothes were dirty and were probably what she had been wearing the day before. Strangely, her ears were pierced and she had little diamond studs in them. On her wrist was a green bracelet. At first Nan thought that it was just cheap plastic but when she took it off she saw that it was lacquered silver. There was a name on the bracelet written in cartoon font, “Wendy Darling”

Nan mused at the irony of the bracelet, Wendy Darling went to Neverland with Peter Pan to be the mother of the Lost Boys and now she was a lost girl who needed a mother.

Nan made an arrangement with Maria to watch Wendy during the day. To Maria she was just one of the many kids that lived at the ranch. At night, the little girl slept in Nan’s room and the older woman fed her breakfast in the morning.

As Wendy grew she might have suffered from a lack of nurturing but that wasn’t the case, she loved and was loved by Maria and almost everyone except Nan. Maria’s children were her brothers and sisters. Nan was more like a grandmother than a mom, she was sixty-one years old and she just couldn’t dedicate her life to this little foundling. She provided food and shelter and some companionship but she just couldn’t be the girl’s mother.

Rex - 1991

Montana had never looked better to Rex when his unit was finally home. After four months of living in the dirt in an all male environment, he felt like he was in haven. The green mountains and the clean air were like medicine to him. Even hearing the soft voices of girls and women made him feel good.

After things settled down a bit he had time to talk to Ramón about the ranch business and to Nan about the guest house. It pleased him to see that both had so run well without his daily supervision.

He sat down with Nan and went over the reports from her work and complemented her on a good job. She said that she needed to hire someone to help her in the office which was no surprise to him He had offered several times in the past but she had always turned him down. When the business talk was done they chatted for a while.

“Nan, who it that little blond girl I see playing in the yard?”

“That’s my niece’s girl, Wendy. She’s staying with me for a while”

“She’s really cute but she was speaking Spanish?”

“She’s learned that from Maria Vasquez’s kids. She stays with Maria during the day”

“Well, do what ever you like about hiring someone. Now that the road is open and paved, you might get a girl from town”

“I guess I could but one of the ranch hands wives will probably want the job.

As the months went by Rex had almost put the burden of the bank box out of his mind when just before Christmas, he got a call from the armory that his equipment from Iraq had arrived.

Saturday morning, with a feeling of dread and remorse, he took an old suitcase from his closet and drove to the armory. He spent the morning cleaning and storing the equipment until finally they was only one crate left. He transferred the money to the old suitcase and tossed the empty crate into the dumpster. His last task was to sweep up the Iraqi sand from the floor. He thought about it and then found an empty glass jar. He filled the jar with the sand and put a label on it then he took the jar into the office and asked the corporal at the desk to put it into the unit’s trophy case. The corporal laughed when he saw the label.

Montana National Guard Aug 1990 – March 1991 Dirt City, Saudi Arabia “A Hell of a War”

Back at the ranch, Rex put the suit case in the storage room in the house. He had kept one of the bills in his pocket. He still wasn’t sure that it wasn’t counterfeit and when he got the chance he would find out.

He didn't know what he was going to do with the money and he didn't want to think about it. For the foreseeable future he was going to run the ranch and Hamilton Aviation and the business at Nine Mile Lake.

Hyatt Regency Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia – Summer 1991.

A group of business men were assembled at the curb in front of the hotel as their tour bus arrived. An hour ago they had arrived from the airport wearing suits and ties but now they were adorned in flowered shirts and casual slacks. Some were carrying cameras and two had back packs.

The tour director greeted them and gave a quick outline of the day's agenda. When they were in their seats an assistant passed out bottles of cold water and assured them that the drive to their first stop wouldn't take long.

The first few miles of the trip were through the heavy traffic of the city and the tourists chatted among themselves. The talk was about the long flight, the luxury of their suites and the prospects of exotic Malaysian food. Once the city was left behind they were on a high speed motorway for half an hour and then the bus turned on a private road and passed through two security gates before arriving at a large ranch house in the rain forest.

The passengers left the bus but didn't enter the house. They walked around to the pool area and found their way into a large recreation room that stood away from the house. While most of the men arranged themselves into the typical seating of business meetings with the highest rank in front and the layers of subordinates aligned behind, the men with backpacks removed electronic sensors and swept the room for listening devices. Not a word was said until they indicated that all was secure.

Finally, a tall man stood, praised god and welcomed the men to the meeting. All of the conversation was in Arabic.

"I don't understand why Bush let the Iraqis off so easily, why didn't they take Bagdad?" one of the seated men said.

"Well I don't know if losing your army is being let off easily but they didn't want Bagdad, they came for the oil.", replied the tall leader.

"Saddam didn't lose much of an army, the Republican Guard it still safe and all of that armor was obsolete." Replied another seated at the table.

"Bush was afraid of another Vietnam. The Americans lost their will to fight in that debacle. Oh they might send their hi-tech military to some minor hotspot but they have no stomach for an extended fight with an insurgent force. They never understood the Viet Cong and they never learned how to deal with them. Saddam was easy, a large army out in the field begging for hellfire missiles. If you want to fight the Americans or any European country, you don't do it with a tank. You do it an alley with a knife.

Many of us in this room have been in the west for business or education and we need to talk about how we can remove these infidels from our lives. We have been the little brown brothers of the west for a long time and the time has come for us to kill our

oppressors. God is on our side and we need to apply what history had taught us about the weaknesses of the west.

When the Romans conquered a land they brought peace. They built roads and stone buildings and they killed anyone who opposed them. In time, they molded the local people into images of themselves but they were never really equals. Oh, they were good enough to serve in the army or work in the laundry and to make them compliant they were called 'Citizens of Rome'. After a few hundred years, most of the citizens of Rome were not really Romans. When the Vandals arrived at the gates, the Roman leaders call on the 'Citizens' to stop driving taxi cabs and working in the 7-11 stores and cleaning swimming pools and to take up arms against the foe.

In America today, their white, Roman leaders are asking their black, yellow, and brown 'Citizens' to protect against the modern Vandals, who are us. We and the rest of our Islamic brothers are the Vandals of the late 20th century. When Holland invited the Indonesians to come and sweep their streets, when the Germans invited the Turks to come and dig their ditches, when the French invited the Algerians to come and clean their toilets and the Americans ask anyone with dark skin to come and pick their fruit, they invited us to drive them back behind their walls and to leave us and god to have the rest of the world.

When the Americans encountered the native red man the first thing that they did was build a fort. They felt safe when they could separate themselves from the rabble. The Khyber Pass is strewn with the ruins of the forts that the British built so they could subjugate the Afghans and the Pakistanis. The French built forts all over North Africa. Everywhere the western nations went they built forts. When things were bad they withdrew inside the walls and felt safe. We want them to do that now”

“Sir with no disrespect, how can we do that?”

“We are going to start a war and in some ways it will be a war that we can't win, at least we can't win it in the western way of thinking. Our goal isn't to conquer their lands it's to get them to pull back inside their wall so they will feel safe from us.

The Americans didn't lose in Vietnam because they lost the battle, in fact they won every battle that they fought. They didn't lose because their army didn't do a good job. They lost because their people became fed up with what they were doing so far from home. They lost the will to fight and they wanted to pull back inside the fort where they felt safe.

It's our job to strike such a devastating blow that they will be incensed enough to go to a foreign war. They will feel so threatened that they will doubt themselves and all around them. They will see enemies behind every dark face. Their taxi drivers and fruit pickers and 7-11 clerks will be suspect. Their Constitution and Bill of Rights will become a hindrance to them rooting out the unseen enemy so they will ignore it. Their soldiers will chase ghosts across the barren desert or deep forest. They will die by the hundreds but not

from tanks or artillery but from a knife in an alley in Damascus or Bagdad or Kabul or Karachi or anywhere else that they can be found.

After they have been frustrated for years and after the American people start howling for peace and just before the presidential election, we will strike a second devastating blow. The President will suspend the elections sighting the need to maintain control of his defense of the nation against the forces of the evil Islamic. That will end the 200+ year of the experiment in Democracy.

America will become a police state and the rest of the west will follow. China will become the world's superpower and we will have no trouble from those infidels. The Muslim world will make Muslim babies who will be educated by devout Imams who will teach the Koran. There will be no discos, no rock and roll, and no cyber cafes. The world will be as god meant it to be.

Now my brothers begin your quest but guard yourselves. Under no circumstances should you underestimate the west. They listen to our cell phones so throw them away. They read our email so don't use it, only trust those whom you know and trust now. Allow no new person into your inner circle. Be bold and, to use a Wall Street term, think outside the box. We have time and, thanks to god, we have a nearly unlimited supply of money. The Americans will elect a new president in late 2000. We should strike the first of our world changing blows in 2001. We have ten years to plan and train. Praise be to god."

The meeting ended with a prayer and the tourists walked to their bus. They drove to a thousand year old temple complex and later to a beautiful restaurant on the banks of a river. The Malaysian food was, indeed, exotic and by the time they returned to their hotel, the men were eager for a nap to prepare for their long flights home the next day.

After the bus had pulled away from their idyllic meeting place near the ranch house pool, two local men came with brooms and mops. They meticulously cleaned and polished and rearranged the chairs. The older man left for his truck with the cleaning supplies while the younger check for trash in a rubbish can that was hidden nicely in a teakwood stand, after finding nothing in the can, he removed a small box from a hollow place in the stands leg.

That evening the box was passed to the bartender at a local night spot and an hour later the young man found a large sum of money under a rock in a local park. The box was on an Air Singapore flight to New York and in less then twenty four hours it was in CIA headquarters in Langley Virginia.

Inside the box was a miracle of electronic magic. It was a solid state, voice recorder. It had no moving parts and its electric signature was so slight that only a very special sensor device could detect it. When the technician downloaded the data he found just over one hour of conversation but his job wasn't to listen to the recording, in fact he was specifically forbidden from hearing to the content.

The data was passed through several hands where it was translated to English and routed to the appropriate analysis section. The Malaysian tourists were still on their flights home when two mid-east analysts studied the data.

“So Ed, what do you think?”

“You listened to it. Did you hear anything that we don’t already know?”

“Just lots of the same chest beating that we’ve heard before. Push them into the sea, ‘Kill the great Satan’, and all of that bull. A new ten year plan, this must be the tenth ten year plan that I’ve heard of. Do we agree that the leader is that tall, rich kid that we’ve been following?”

“I’m sure it’s him but we better get a voice match just to be sure. I guess we will just send the tape and an analyses report upstairs and they’ll do something with it”

“Do you think that they’ll alert the FBI?”

“Are you kidding, we send them as much as they send us, exactly nothing”

Rosie & Annie -1989

After the girls settled into the house in Rattlesnake canyon, they both looked for a job. Annie was a natural for the Redrock city library and within a week she as the assistant librarian. Rosie had more of a problem finding work. Her degree in Art History might have looked good in a big city but Redrock didn’t have much call for her skills. There was one Art-History teacher at the high school who had been there for thirty years and had no plans to retire.

She had several interviews but no offers. She decided to have lunch one day in Mom’s Kitchen when she had yet another lesson in how things are done in a very small town. She was seated in a corner booth when a large, middle-aged woman approached her table.

“Miss Jones?”

Looking up with a question, Rosie answered,

“Yes, I’m Rosemary Jones”

“Hi, I’m Stella Bumgard, I’m the principle of the high school and I hear that you’re looking for a job”

Amused, Rosie smiled,

“I guess bad news travels fast in Redrock”

She waved the woman to set down.

“I have a job that you might be interested in. The school has a business intern program where several senior students run the districts purchasing department. Six students working three hours each a day do all of the research and buying of the supplies for three schools. I need a manager to act as their boss and to make sure that they don’t buy an airliner or a trainload of toilet paper. The manager works the schools schedule. That’s eight to three-thirty, five days a week with all holidays and the three summer months off. There is health and retirement benefits but the pay’s not so great. Are you interested?”

That evening, Annie came in the door and was surprised that there were no smells of dinner coming from the kitchen. Without a word, Rosie gave her a little hug and a kiss and handed her a glass of wine.

“What are you doing Rosemary, is something going on?”

“No bacon and beans for you tonight, we’re celebrating. After you drink your wine, put on your best blue jeans and we’re going to the roadhouse for a steak and country music. Maybe we can catch ourselves a couple of cowboys”

“Ok, tell the truth, did you rob the bank?”

“Better then that, I have a job and not just any job but a professional position as a manager of some import and responsibility.”

“And?”

“I’m the new manager of the Redrock School District Purchasing Department, that’s R.S.D.P.D to those who know about this sort of thing”

Annie laughed at her friend’s humor,

“I’m impressed, now tell me dear, just what do we do with these cowboys if we catch them?”

Molly & Nan's Dilemma – 1991

Molly and Rex had been married two and a half years and she was ready to start a family. In fact she had been ready for quite a while but so far nothing had happened. She talked to her doctor who gave her a pamphlet that discussed the best times and how to maximize their chances. He also suggested a fertility test for both her and Rex but she thought that that was a little premature.

Rex dismissed her concerns saying that a baby would come when the time was right and she shouldn't worry about it. That hadn't made her feel any better but she did try to put it out of her mind.

She noticed a little blond girl playing with the myriad of Mexican children around the ranch hands quarters and she had asked Rex about her.

"That's Nan's niece or grand-niece or something. She said that she was staying a while but she's been here for sometime. Why, should I ask Nan how much longer she's going to stay?"

"No, it's fine. I just wondered"

Molly sat on the back steps of the house and watched the girl. Finally she called her over and talked to her.

"What's your name honey?"

"Wendy" the girl said with no shyness at all.

"What a pretty name. Would you like some cookies?"

"Yes please, I like cookies. Maria makes good cookies but she only gives me one and I have to share"

"Come in the kitchen, I'll give you two and you don't have to share"

They sat at the table and ate cookies and talked.

"How old are you, sweetheart?"

The girl held up four fingers. Molly thought that it was odd.

"Either Wendy is the world's smartest four-year old or she's older. I wonder what's up with that." Molly thought.

Molly waited everyday for Wendy to come around for a cookie. Sometimes the girl brought one of Maria's other kids with her which disappointed Molly. She loved to talk to the girl and to please her with treats. Rex noticed Molly was talking a lot about Nan's niece but he thought nothing about it. When she got the chance, she spoke to Nan.

"Hi Nan, that's quite a niece that you have"

"Oh Wendy, she's really not my niece, she's the daughter of a friend of my niece. She's just staying here for a short time. That's ok isn't it?"

"Sure, no problem, she seems very smart and she says that she's only four years old."

“That’s what my niece says. If she’s any problem, I’ll keep her away from the ranch house”

“No, please don’t do that, I really enjoy having her around”

Nan was worried that she was going to be found out. She could have told the deputy that the dead woman had a daughter but she had kept it to herself and now it was too late to admit what she had done. She couldn’t face the prospects of the little girl spending her life in the foster care system but she was painting herself into a corner.

It was obvious to her and to others that the girl was older than she had originally thought. Nan had no identification for her and she knew that when she was old enough for school, she had to have something to identify her. Racked with guilt over the situation, she finally decided that she would commit one more lawless act to secure the girl’s future. She needed to get a birth certificate.

When she was married to the Oakland cop, he had told her about a slick identity scheme that he had worked on. It had only been an accident that it hadn’t worked and Nan decided to give it a try. She asked Rex for a day off and she drove quite a ways to Helena, the state capitol.

Once she was in the city she drove to the offices of the Helena Independent Record newspaper and for two dollars she was allowed to search through the microfiche library of all of the past editions. After scanning many papers she found what she was looking for.

Accident takes lives of Butte family

Helena – March 22, 1989

A Butte family was tragically killed in a head-on collision on state highway 14 last night when their car drifted over the center line and collided with a logging truck. The driver of the truck was injured but is expected to make a full recovery.

Lee Marvin Denials, 32, and his wife Martha Anne Brown Denials, 30, along with their three year old daughter Susan Maria Denials, all of Butte Montana were pronounced dead at the scene.

The Denials were both raised in Helena but had resided in Butte for two years.

It took Nan several hours to find the rest of the puzzle.

Local man marries high school sweetheart

Helena – June 14, 1985

Wedding services were held Saturday at the Grace Baptist church for Helena residence Lee Marvin Denials and Martha Ann Brown. It was a double calibration as both the bride and groom were celebrating their birthday, June 14, 1958 for the groom and 1960 for the bride.

(See Denials Wedding on page 9)

Finally Nan found the last information that she needed.

Baby girl born to Helena couple

Helena – June 15, 1986

A daughter was born to Helena couple Lee and Martha Denials in Saint Mark's hospital in a situation that will amuse those who think the stars influence the birth of children. Susan Marie Denials was born on both her fathers and her mother's birthday. This papers Science Editor estimates that the chances of that happening are one in a trillion.

(See Denials Baby on page 7)

Nan went to a pay phone and called the Helena Hall of Records. When she finally found the right clerk she told her that she had lost her daughters birth certificate and she needed a certificated copy. The clerk asked her for her daughters name and date of birth. She also asked for Nan's name, maiden name and date of birth. Nan held her breath expecting the clerk to ask for a social security number that she couldn't provide. Finally the clerk ask for a mailing address and told Nan that if she would send a money order for eight dollars, the certificate would be sent by return mail.

One week later, Wendy became Susan Marie Denials and she was five years old.

Rosie Jones – 1993

Rosie was a little melancholy on her twenty-ninth birthday. Annie had made a big deal of the day and had baked a cake. They had gone to dinner at the roadhouse and she had danced with a couple of the cowboys that she had met over the last four years. Both of them made indecent propositions to her that she turned down but she was glad that they had paid her the attention. Annie, who never forgot a significant date and gave her a silk scarf and a bottle of cologne. All in all the day had been exactly like her 28th and 27th birthday.

That night, in bed, with Annie sleeping beside her, she thought about her life. As a little girl she played in the tiny Iowa town where she grew up and she had an uneventful time in high school. Her one high school romance had turned out badly and she wondered now it that had had a bigger impact on her life than she thought.

The only thing that interested her in college was Annie who she had always thought of as her best and nearly only friend. She knew that she truly loved the sassy girl even from the first although she wasn't attracted to her the way some girls were attracted to the other girls.

She had been with Annie for eleven years, ten of which they had been roommates. They had slept in the same bed for all of those years and they had let the world think that they were sisters.

She couldn't sleep so she went to the fridge and then took a glass of milk out to the back porch. It was chilly and she wrapped herself in the afghan from the back of the couch. The moonlight on the trees and the meadow beyond was beautiful and she thought about her eleven years with her best friend. Annie had made college bearable and she had enjoyed their time in San Francisco, at least all but the last day. She wondered how Karma was and if she still had her shop. She had liked the nutty lady a lot and she would like to see her again.

It was hard to realize that she had lived here in Redrock for nearly five years. She liked her job and she had made several friends. There were a couple of lady teachers that she shared lunches and occasional night on the town. There was a nice guy that taught business class and she had several dates with him, or at least what passed for dates. They went to dinner and to the movies but there was never any fire. No, fire was too strong. There was never any anything. She thought that he might kiss her or try to feel her up but nothing. She liked dancing with the cowboys but she wasn't ready for the kind of action that they were offering.

Annie got her attention recently when she had a date with a guy that she met at the library and although nothing came of it she did have to consider the possibility that the woman that she lived with and slept with nightly might someday find a boyfriend, or a husband. What would she do then?

She woke up cold in the middle of the night. She went to the bedroom and crawled into bed with Annie who woke up just a little,
“Where have you been sweetie, did you have a bad dream?” Annie said as she gave Rosie one of her warm momma kisses and then turned and went back to sleep.
That little bit of intimacy left Rosie more melancholy then ever.

Rosie was in the shower when the phone rang. Annie answered it and heard a girl ask for Rosemary.

“She’s not available, can I take a message?”

“Who is this?”

“I’m her sister, Ann. Can I ask who is calling?”

“Just tell her Boo called”

“Does she have your number?”

“Just tell her, bye”

Annie looked puzzled at the dead phone and shrugged.

“Who was on the phone?” Rosie asked as she came out drying her hair with a towel.

“It was some one for you. A rude girl named Boo”

“What did you say?”

“I told her that my sister wasn’t available and that she could leave a message”

“You said that you were my sister?”

“Well, you know, like we always do”

“That’s interesting”

“Why, who’s Boo”

“Well sister Annie, that was our other sister Robin, you know, our little sister Boo”

“Oh”

Rosie came out of the bedroom after talking to her little sister and she seemed happy.

“What up?” Annie asked.

“Robin’s graduating from San Francisco State and she asked me to come out for the ceremony. My parents will be there and we will all be together for the first time in years. She asked me to stay over for a few days after mom and dad have gone home.”

“Did she mention the sister thing?”

“Not a word”

“Are you ok about going back to San Francisco?”

“Sure, why wouldn’t I be”

“Oh don’t be coy, you know why”

“Annie, I’m over it. I’m not letting a little thing like being drugged and raped by a witch ruin my life”

“Rosie?”

“Don’t start on the HIV thing again”

“Don’t you think that you should at least have the test just to put it out of your mind?”

“You mean to put it out of your mind. Don’t worry even if I had it you can’t catch it from me”

“Well we do kiss sometimes”

“God Annie, you couldn’t catch a cold from your little momma kisses”

“Damn it Rosie, suppose I got carried away some night and gave you a passionate kiss and I put my tongue in your mouth?”

Rosie looked at her until Ann blushed then she calmly said,

“I guess that we can do that but would you brush your teeth first?”

Ann turned and went out the back door. She sat on the swing not knowing whether to cry or laugh. Rosie refused to take her serious even when the subject was serious. When she was calm she walked back into the kitchen and heard Rosie humming a little song as she brushed her hair in the bedroom. On the table was an official looking document and when Annie read it she saw that it was a report from the Montana Department of Health. It was dated two years earlier and it said that the results of Rosemary Jones’s HIV test were negative.

Annie walked up behind Rosie and swatted her on the butt. Then she put her arms around her friend and told her that she loved her. As Ann walked back towards the kitchen Rosie called to her,

“Does that mean that the passionate kiss thing is off?”

Rosie met her parents at their San Francisco hotel and they had lunch before going to the college for her sister’s ceremony. She had briefly visited her mom and dad twice since she had graduated from college but they seemed much older to her now. They talked about her sister and they were quite disappointed that she was going to live in California instead of returning to Iowa. Rosie suggested that there wasn’t much for young people to do in their little farm town but her mom mentioned several local girls that lived near their parents.

They didn’t get to talk to Robin before the ceremony and there was no way that they could see her in the crowd of several hundred caps and gowns. They met afterwards at the preplanned rendezvous’ and it was a happy reunion. They went to dinner and her parents gave Robin a very nice watch and a good leather briefcase. After dinner they went back to the hotel and the girls sat through two hours of reminiscing about their childhood.

It was after eight when Robin and Rosie arrived at the apartment. They talked about their folks during the drive but as Robin parked the car she indicated that she wanted to talk.

“Rosie, I don’t want you to be surprised when go in. I want you to know that my roommate, Andrea is really my partner, I’m gay like you”

Rosie sat still not saying a word and trying to figure what Robin had said.

“Honey, I’m not gay”

“Come on sis, drop the act, I’ve known since I was in grade school, you and Annie have been together for years. I know that you hide it by saying that your sisters but I can tell

when a person's gay. I'm sure that mom knows too but she would never say anything. Now let's go meet Andy, she's a wonderful person."

Rosie was alone in the apartment with Robin and Andy gone. They were just going out the door when Rosie got out of the shower. Robin hollered that they would be home around five and that Rosie would have to entertain herself for the day.

She had a terrible night. She tried to think of a way to convince Robin that she was wrong about her and Annie being gay. For every reason that she could think of she imagined Robin's response. They had lived together for eleven years, they shared a bed, after graduation they had come straight to the gay capitol of the world, they bought property together and neither had ever had any kind of a relationship with a man.

With nothing better to do, Rosie went to Karma's shop. She was delighted to see Rosie and she immediately put the 'Closed' sign on the door and they went up to her apartment. Sitting on the sunny rooftop, Rosie drank Diet Coke while Karma smoked a joint. They talked about the past and a little about the future and finally Karma asked,

"Are you still with your partner, what's her name? Ann?"

"Why do you call her my partner?"

"What? You know, your special friend"

"Do you think I'm gay?"

"Well, yes, of course"

"Why do you think that?"

"Well, you know, when you live in this town long enough you develop 'gay-dar'"

Rosie was sitting in the crowded economy section of the airliner as it made its way toward Helena Airport. She had been troubled for days about her sisters and Karma's assessment of her. It wasn't their opinions that had her upset. It was her own confusion about herself. She reached for her little plastic glass of Coke that was sitting on her tray table and knocked it into the lap of the man sitting beside her.

"Oh I'm sorry, let me find a napkin" she said trying to get the sweet coke of both of them.

He went quickly back to the galley and just as quickly returned with both wet and dry paper towels.

"Here you are mam, let me help you clean up."

"Mam" she thought, "He's no older than me,"

"Oh that's alright sir, I can get it"

When they were both clean of spilled coke she had a chance to look at him. He was a nice looking man and he was about her age. He was wearing a flannel shirt and tight blue jeans. They were the kind that they call stovepipe. She was a little surprised that he wasn't wearing cowboy boots which were almost a uniform in Montana. Instead he had

well worn hiking boots. His even features were spoiled by what looked like a three day beard.

He smiled and said,

“I’m sorry that I called you mam, I could tell that you were a little offended”

“Oh not really, I get used to the kids at school calling me that but I usually don’t get it from guys my age”

He laughed,

“Are you a teacher?”

“No but I do work in a high school, I manage the purchasing department”

“Do you work in Helena?”

“No, in a little town about two hours drive away.”

“I’m going to the little town where I grew up. My folks still live there”

“Oh, where’s that?”

“Somewhere that you never heard of, Redrock, Redrock Montana”

“It must be tiny. I wonder if their high school has a purchasing department.”

“I suppose”

“Do they have a library and a café called Mom’s Kitchen?”

He smiled,

“You live in Redrock, don’t you?”

When they picked up their baggage she asked if his parents were meeting him and he said that he was taking the bus. Before she could think of the consequences of offering a perfect stranger a ride, she had him in the jeep and they were driving into the Montana afternoon.

His name was Steve Bowman and he was going to school in the Bay Area. He had a summer internship with Purina’s animal feed division in Elk Horn which was just a few miles from Redrock.

As they drove they chatted about the little town and his parents.

“I grew up on a ranch that’s up in the canyon. My dad worked there for years but after they retired they moved to town”

“What canyon?”

“Rattlesnake canyon, we lived on Mr. Button’s place, later they called it Hippycamp”

Rosie laughed this time,

“My ... sister and I live in Rattlesnake canyon and it’s the Hamilton Ranch now”

“My dad told me that Rex Hamilton had bought the place. Rex and I went to high school together and, as a matter of fact, I’m going to do some work up there this summer.”

Rosie dropped him at his parent’s house on Oak Street and before she drove away he asked if he could call her. When she nodded yes, he waved and walked away. She thought that it was strange that he hadn’t asked for her phone number. She realized how much she had enjoyed their drive and chat. He was easy to talk to and he certainly wasn’t shy.

When she walked in the door, the phone was ringing,

“Hello”

“Hi Rosemary, this is Steve, I wanted to thank you for driving me home and I wondered if I could take you to dinner tonight?”

She was very surprised at his quick call and she was surprised at how happy it made her.

“Sure Steve but It will have to wait for me to take a shower and a nap. Could we make it around eight?”

“Eight o’clock, I’ll be there”

“I guess I don’t need to tell you where I live”

“No, I’ll find it”

“How did you get my number?”

“Oh I called Mary Anderson, you know, the local telephone operator, and I asked her to ring Rosemary Jones. It really is a small town you know”

Rosie looked at her watch, it was nearly four and she hadn’t seen Annie yet. She had to have a serious talk with her pseudo sister but she didn’t want to spoil the mood of Steve calling.

Ann came home a little after five and found Rosie sleeping on the couch. She wanted to hear about her trip but she also knew how tiring flying could be. She was quietly reading the newspaper when she was surprised by the alarm clock ringing. Rosie had set it for six thirty and had put it under the couch.

“Hey sleepyhead, how was the trip?”

“Some really good, some ok, and some not so good, how were things here?”

“Ok, a little lonely, I had a surprise visitor, that little girl, Wendy that lives at the ranch came to see me on Saturday. She just walked in. I called Nan to tell her but Nan is spending some time with her sister in Oakland and Molly is looking after her. When I called Molly she sounded relieved. I guess Wendy is used to just coming and going as she pleases. She was here about an hour and, believe me, that kid is smart.”

Rosie put the coffee pot on and sat with Annie.

“So what was the not so good part, memories of ... you know?”

“No but I don’t want to talk about it now. I hope that you don’t mind but I’m going out tonight and I need to get ready”

“Out, where are you going?”

“On a date, I’m going on a date with a guy I met today”

Annie was giving her a ‘momma’ look.

“Who is this guy and what do you know about him?”

“He’s a local guy who grew up at the Hamilton Ranch and his mom and dad live on Oak Street, he’s going to school in the Bay Area and he’s here for the summer, his name is Steve Bowman and I’ve already checked the FBI’s most wanted list”

Annie got the picture that her concern wasn’t wanted,

“Bowman? Wasn’t that the name of that ax murderer in Florida?”

Rosie was still putting on her lipstick when she heard the knock at the door. The clock struck eight as Annie greeted their guest. They were introducing themselves when Rosie came out. Steve was clean shaven and this time he was wearing cowboy boots.

They went to the roadhouse for steaks and cold beer and they danced until the owner turned off the lights. He walked her to her front door and kissed her on the cheek. He said the he had to go to Elk Horn the next day but he would call her that night, if it was alright with her. When she went inside, Annie was waiting on the couch.

“How was it, happy girl?”

“Oh it was fun, fun, fun. I have never danced so much in my life”

“Is he a gentleman?”

“Do you mean did he try to ravage me? No, he is very sweet”

“Did he kiss you?”

“Right here” she said pointing to her cheek, “I may never wash again”

“Oh Rosie, I’m so glad that you had a good time”

“Why didn’t you tell me that it would feel like this?”

“How would I know, I’ve never felt like you do now”

As they were getting ready for bed, Rosie decided to tell Annie about her sisters and Karma thoughts.

“Ann, my sister and Karma think I’m gay, that we’re gay, do you feel gay?”

Annie looked a perplexed.

“Well no Rosie, I don’t feel gay but I guess I can see how they might mistake our ... relationship for ... for something that it’s not ... I do love you ... not in a sexual way but ... different then the way I love my parents and sister ... I know that we act like sisters so people won’t ... you know .. think bad things about us ... I like to have women friends, I’m more comfortable around them then the guys that I know but I never ‘want’ them ... I never want anyone ... that worries me ... it worries me a lot .. I want to be a sexual person but so far ... you’re the only person that I’ve wanted to be around ... no Rosie, I’m not gay ... I’m not sure that I’m anything.... Does that make any sense?”

Annie had tears in her eyes and she looked at the floor. Rosie wanted to hug and comfort her but maybe this wasn’t the time. Finally she couldn’t just let her sit there crying. She sat beside her and held her in her arms.

“I know sweetheart, mostly that’s the way I feel but something happened to me today. Remember in high school when girls talked about feeling ‘gushy’? I never knew what they meant but tonight I feel ‘gushy’. If this guy breaks my heart I’ll break a part of him that will make him sing like a soprano”

The summer passed too quickly for both Rosie and Steve. They spent almost every evening together. The romance progressed to some making out on the back porch swing but if he tried to go too far she reminded him to be good. Deep in her heart she had a fear

that this might be just a summer fling for him and in the fall he would go back to his Bay Area babes. The day that he was going back to school, she took the day off and drove him to the airport in Helena.

He surprised her by giving her his laptop computer so they could communicate by email. He didn't think he would have enough time off to come home for Thanksgiving but he promised her the he would be there for Christmas break.

She didn't cry on the drive home but she did turn the radio to a country station that played all of the sad songs about trucks and momma and dogs and trains.

Rosie had been looking out the window all day. The sky was dark and there were snow flurries. Her job at the school was over for Christmas vacation and so was Steve's. He was flying home today and he insisted that he didn't want her to meet him in Helena because of the unpredictable weather in December. He assured her that he would be at her front door before five that evening.

Around two it started snowing hard and by four the snow was drifting against her front porch. Annie was in Iowa visiting her parents and Rosie was alone. The house was snug and warm but she knew that the power might go off in a real storm and she had moved a big pile of firewood onto the hearth just in case.

By five the house was being shaken by gusts of wind and she knew that he wouldn't be there that night. She hoped that he might call but when she picked up the phone to check for a dial tone it was dead. Just before six the power failed and the house was dark. From experience she had candles and a Coleman lantern.

The fire was blazing and she was lying on the couch listening to music on the portable radio when she heard a banging on the door. At first she thought that it was just the wind but she thought that she heard someone calling her name.

"God I hope that he wasn't dumb enough to come out in a blizzard" she thought as she looked through the peephole on the door. She saw a guy in a sheepskin jacket with his face wrapped in a scarf,

"WHO IS IT" she called.

"ITS ME HONEY, PLEASE LET ME IN"

She threw open the door and he fell inside. He was covered with snow and he looked like a Popsicle.

"Steven Bowman, didn't your mother teach you to ..."

Her mouth was covered by his and he had lifted her off of the floor. They kissed all the way to the fireplace where she stripped off his snow covered jacket, gloves, scarf and boots.

Just when she was trying to figure out how to make something hot to eat and drink, the lights came back on so she quickly made a pot of coffee and cooked some bacon and

eggs. When he had eaten and warmed up they cuddled together on the couch with hot cups of coffee. They didn't talk about much except how glad they were to be together. Sometime around eleven he looked at his watch and she knew that he was thinking how to get home.

"You can't go out in this weather, your staying here tonight."

"What will the neighbors think?"

"They will wonder how the Spinster Jones ever got a man into her house at night"

"Ok honey, I'll be fine here on the couch besides the fire"

After Rosie had put on her nightgown she went into the living room where Steve was tucked in under the covers on the couch. She noticed that his shirt and pants were folded neatly on a chair and his jacket and boots were near the fire drying. She sat beside him and kissed him good night. When she went to bed she left her door open so she could feel closer to him.

An hour after she had gone to bed she was still wide awake. She could see the flickers from dying fire still lighting the living room. She quietly said,

"Steven, are you awake?"

Just as quietly he answered,

"Yes Rosemary"

"Do you want to come in here?"

"Only if you want me to"

She didn't say anything for a minute then he said,

"Goodnight honey"

"No Steven, come in here, at least for a while"

She closed her eyes and listened as he came in. She felt the covers pulled back as he slid in beside her. She turned towards him and he pulled her into his arms. She was shaking a little and he asked,

"Are you cold honey, your shivering?"

"I'm not cold, you must be freezing, you don't have anything on, are you wearing socks? I read in a ladies magazine that it was very unromantic for a man to wear socks to bed, my god, maybe I'm wearing socks ... no... I'm ok Did I turn off the coffee pot ... I should probably go check ... I ... I don't remember if I brushed my teeth ... I should go to the bathroom ..."

His warm lips covered hers and her last jumbled thought was that she wished that she had read that article in Cosmo about how to please a man.

He spent every night in her bed until Annie came home on December 28th. After that they moved their lovemaking to his parent's house that was available because his folks were wintering in Palm Springs California.

When he returned to school for his final semester, they promised to call or email everyday. They went to Honolulu for a week at spring break and they were married in

June, just a week after he received his PhD in Animal Nutrition from the University of California at Davis.

After a two week honeymoon in Maui they moved into the farm that was just south of Rosie's and Annie's place. Rex's dad Karl had retired and had sold Steve the place. Rosie and Annie wouldn't and couldn't be too far apart but they both knew that they had their own lives to live now.

Tim Van Dam – 1994

Tim's war ended suddenly in March of 1991 when he received orders for London and was given just a few hours to pack his gear and get to the air base. Everything that he didn't need for London was packed into a footlocker and shipped to Mississippi. For the next few months he translated telephone intercepts for the CIA. He was curious about the message's origins but it was useless to ask the CIA anything.

He enjoyed London and the social life that went with it, but by the fall he had the flu and was miserable. What he and the doctors thought would be a brief convalescence dragged on towards winter. Finally the Army decided to send him to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio Texas to see if they could solve his problem.

After an extended stay, the doctors declared him fit for duty and he was assigned to Fort Carson near Colorado Springs. He still felt weak from his ordeal but he thought that it was the high altitude of his new post. He had many aches and pains but when he went to sick bay, the doctor wasn't sympathetic. He tried to get a waiver from his annual fitness test but again the doctor showed no patience with him. He was sure that the doctor thought that he was faking to get out the test.

He failed the test and within a month he was back in the hospital. It was there that he heard 'Gulf War Syndrome' mentioned for the first time. He didn't hear it from a doctor but from another patient.

"Were you at Qwi when they burned the dump?" Tim was asked by the other guy.
"Yea, I was there and the next day we were walking in the ashes from the fire"

After being in and out of Army hospitals for two years, Tim was placed on inactive reserve and sent home for his inability to meet the physical requirements. The Army, the Veterans Administration and the government absolutely denied that 'Gulf War Syndrome' was anything but a ploy to get a big financial reward for vets and lawyers.

After sitting around the Pepper Bar on Mino Island and drinking hundreds of bottles of Miller Lite beer, Tim thought that he should do something with his life. He needed a job that didn't require a lot of physical effort and he did have an excellent education.

He had thought of attending law school and he took a six week course on how to pass the LSat exam. With very good results and excellent grades from West Point he applies for admission to the Law School at Old Miss and when the results were published, he had scored in the top five percent but he didn't get in. Several black students with lower scores had been admitted with their Affirmative Action bonus points.

Controlling his anger, he sent résumés to two dozen defense contractors who could use his expertise and his Army contact, but, in every case, he was turned down. He called each personnel director to inquire what he was lacking for their job. Several wouldn't talk

to him but the others made it clear that with the government's guidelines for contractors, he was too affluent and too white.

Tim was livid. He loved his country and would have given his life for it and now he wasn't wanted. How could they treat him this way, this can't go on, the people will revolt, something had to be done. When he calmed down he realized that there was nothing wrong with the country or the good, god fearing people that made it strong but government that was out of whack.

The Army, his Army, wouldn't treat one of their own this way if they weren't being directed by the penny-pinching, money-grubbing bureaucrats who were covering their own asses. They were the bastards that had to go. He thought about his visit to the VA hospital in Gulfport. There wasn't a white face in the place, except the patients of course.

"How could they justify not hiring a single white person. Had all of the white's been too dumb to get the job?" He didn't blame the blacks for taking advantage of the situation, he blamed the government for their racist discrimination against the whites.

"To right past wrong's", the goddamned law says, hell, I didn't wrong them. Two hundred years of slavery, bullshit, Lincoln fixed that a hundred years ago. Two hundred years ago my people were trying to make a living while fighting to keep the ocean from swallowing them up in Holland. How is this my fault?"

Tim needed to get away from Mississippi, he needed a fresh start somewhere away from so many people and so many rules. He had served in the Gulf with a Sergeant from out west somewhere and they had always said that someday maybe they would do something together. He looked in his footlocker and found his old address book. There was the guys name: Sgt. Rex Hamilton, Rattlesnake Canyon, Redrock Montana.

Want kind of an address is Rattlesnake Canyon he wandered. There was a P.O. box and a phone number.

The phone rang and Tim heard a familiar voice,

"Yea"

"Hey Hamilton, its Van Dam"

"Hey LT, how are you, still in the green machine?"

"No, I'm out on my own, what's up with you?"

"Living in gods country between winters, so what are you doing?"

"Looking for the man in the moon, any ideas where I can find him?"

"Sure, come and look in Montana"

"I wouldn't mind"

"Come on then, do you need anything?"

"I'm good, just how do I find Rattlesnake Canyon?"

Rex laughed,

"Well you find Redrock on the map and follow the map. You do remember how to read a map LT?"

“I can find Redrock just where is this canyon?”

“When you get into town, go to Mom’s Kitchen and asked them to call me. Have a cup of coffee and I’ll be there directly. Got it?”

“I got it, I’ll be there in a few days and ... thanks”

“No problem, see yea”

Molly Hamilton 1996

Molly was so glad that Wendy had come into her life. At first she had just borrowed her from Nan but now that Nan was living in Oakland with her sister, the little girl was hers.

Before Nan left she had given her Wendy's birth certificate but when they talked about legal guardian papers, Nan said that they would take care of that the next time that she came to visit. The problem that Molly saw was that Nan might never come to visit again. Still, they had her address in California and they could always get in touch with her.

Wendy was such a joy for everyone around her. She was driven to school each morning by their neighbor Ann or sometimes by Ann's sister Rosie. After school she went to the library where Ann saw to it that she did her homework. After that she walked to the Airport where she helped Rex by sweeping and cleaning and occasional pumping gas into airplanes. In other states a ten year old would be forbidden to work but in Montana, family business and farms were just that, for all members of the family.

CIA European Analysis Section – Langley Virginia

“Hey Pete, I’ve been looking at the list of visa’s for mid-east students and the number coming through Amsterdam is up quite a bit this year. I wonder what’s going on in the Netherlands.”

“Hold on a minute John, I’ll check the data base ... are they mostly Saudi’s?”

“Hmm, yea, is that significant?”

“Well the station chief in Amsterdam has a theory that Saudi’s like to spend some time in Amsterdam because of the blond women and the nightlife. Those kids live a pretty sheltered life in the kingdom and they want to let off steam before starting college”

“That’s ok I guess but some of these guys seem a little old to be starting college”

Ann 1996

Ann had finally adjusted to living alone although she still talked to Rosie nearly every day. When her best friend came back from her sisters graduation in San Francisco she had been shaken to the bone by the question about her sexuality. She had made a real effort to meet more people, both men and women. She realized that she had been too comfortable with Rosie for too many years. After Rosie had married, Annie had joined a gym and tried to get out more. She danced with a lot of cowboys at the roadhouse but nothing much had come from that.

A young man started coming in the library at lunchtime to read the current newspapers and magazines. He often had questions for her about where to find various things. At first she had paid no attention to him and didn't recognize his feeble attempts at flirting. She hadn't even noticed that he was wearing the kaki uniform of a deputy sheriff.

Each day he would come at noon with his brown paper lunch bag and would read the paper. Then he would come to Annie's desk with some inane question and would attempt to engage her in conversation. When he missed a day, she wondered where he was.

Redrock seldom had any real crime but a man did pull off of the interstate and hold up the 7/11 store. A gun fight ensued and when the deputy wasn't there at lunch she actually became concerned for his safety. This went on for over a month and she did favor him with a few smiles. One Friday lunch when he came in he walked straight to her desk and surprised her.

"Miss Jones, I'll come straight to the point. There is a concert in the park at noon tomorrow and I would like you to go with me. I can call on you at your home in Rattlesnake Canyon or you can meet me there, which ever you're more comfortable with"

She thought about it for a moment then stood and put out her hand.

"Hello, I'm Ann Jones, and you are...?"

The deputy was embarrassed for forgetting to introduce himself. He took her hand and said,

"Pleased to meet you Miss Jones, I'm James Brown, Jimmy Brown, and I spent so much time working up the nerve to ask you out that I forgot my manners."

Annie and Jimmy saw a lot of each other that year and by Christmas they were talking about an engagement. One evening they visited Rosie and Steve and they were all surprised when Steve greeted the sheriff as “Deputy Dowg”. Rosie thought that her husband was being disrespectful but both of the men laughed.

“Jimmy and I went to high school together, he was a year behind me and he always wanted to be a cop so everyone called him Deputy Dowg”

“Well Steve, I got my wish but its not as exciting as I thought that it would be”

Annie accepted Jimmies proposal but she said that they couldn’t get married until they had save enough money to buy Rosie’s half of the house. Jimmy surprised her when he told her that he had enough in the bank to do it right away.

“When you’re a nerd like me it’s was easy to save because I had no real life.”

They were married in June of 1997 and went to Maui for their honeymoon, just like her sister. She never saw any real reason to tell him that she and Rosie weren’t really sisters. She thought that when he found out she would say that she had told him at the beginning and that he had forgotten.

Tim in Big Sky country

Tim threw everything that he owned into his old pickup and headed west for Montana. He didn't know what to expect when he reached his destination but Hamilton was a good guy and he would put him up for a while. Tim really didn't worry about the future now because he had some money in his pocket and he felt like he had nothing to lose.

Following Rex's directions, he went to Mom's Kitchen and asked the waitress to call Rex. He was surprised when five minutes later, a Hamilton Aviation pickup pulled up in front and Rex walked in the door.

"Hey LT, how the hell are you?"

"I'm good Serge. I'm good and getting better. How did you get here so fast?"

"My business is at the airport, come on and follow me"

A few minutes later they were sitting in Rex's office drinking coffee and it didn't take long before the titles were dropped and it was Tim and Rex.

"So Tim, what do you want to do? Are you just passing through or what?"

"I'm just hanging in space looking for a place to light. For a kid raised in the flatlands of Mississippi, Montana looks good to me"

"Well you haven't seen it snowing sideways yet but it is a great country. The people here are pretty independent and our local government leaves us alone as much as they can. The feds probably don't like it but that's too bad"

"I like the sound of that, could you put me up for a few days until I get a place and a job?"

"Sure I can, what kind of job are you looking for? We really don't need any squad leaders and I don't suppose that you can fly a plane, can you?"

"If I do fly, what do you have in mind?"

"I always have jobs for pilots to fly papers and people and supplies somewhere. I've got a couple of pilots that work when the wind blows the right direction but I need someone who's a little more committed. The pays good, can you fly?"

"I could learn, how long would it take?"

"Have you ever been in a small plane?"

"Sure, I had a buddy in high school whose dad owned a Cub and we flew in that a bunch of times."

"Come on. Let's give you a job interview"

They walked to the flight line where there was an old Super Cub with Hamilton Aviation painted on it. Rex gave it a quick pre-flight and they got into the small plane. The seats were one in front and one in back. Rex put Tim in front and he flew from the backseat. They taxied to the end of the runway where he ran up the engine and check everything one more time then he pointed it down the runway and poured on the power.

The hundred horse power engine had them in the air before half of the strip had disappeared behind them. The air was clear but just a little bumpy. Rex climbed until

they were about three thousand feet above the ground then he raised the nose until the plane started to shudder. Tim was holding onto the sides of his seat when the Cub's left wing dropped quickly and they dropped into a tight spin. The ground below was a spinning blur and was getting close very fast when Rex stopped the spin and let the plane accelerate into a dive. As the nose came up Tim was pushed hard into his seat and all that he could see now was sky. Rex rolled the plane over on its back and held it there until Tim felt the blood rush to his head. Still upside down, the nose dropped towards the ground as they gained speed. Another pull up and then when they were soaring skyward Rex slammed the plane sideways and pulled up at the same time. The plane seemed to cartwheel through the air and Tim was completely disoriented. Finally they were flying straight and level and Tim noticed how beautiful the countryside was.

Tim was surprised when Rex spoke to him through his earphones. Somehow he thought that they were just for talking on the radio.

“Well, what did you think of your interview?”

“It was fine”

“Do you have any questions?”

“Can we do it again?”

Back in the office, Rex called a local flight instructor and got a price for training. He looked at his FAA manual and then told Tim about training. He told him how many hours of ground school were required. How many hours of dual instruction with an instructor were needed and how many hours of solo practice were needed. Following that he would need to pass both a written test and then a flying test. That would get him his basic license but he still couldn't charge to carry passengers or freight. That would take a Commercial which required more hours of training.

“So what's the bottom line Rex and what's the quickest that I could do it?”

“Ok, you can use the Cub but you would have to pay for gas. If you worked on it all day, five days a week, it would cost about \$4000 and it could be done in less than two months.”

“And you will give me a job after that?”

“Sure”

“Ok, lets do it”

After work that evening they drove to the ranch in Rattlesnake Canyon and Rex introduced Tim to Molly. She fixed dinner and later Rex took him to a room in the bunk house. It was small but it had a shower and toilet and access to the central kitchen. Rex said that he could live there until he got himself squared away. Tim insisted on paying the regular rate.

“Rex, I have a footlocker that would take up half of my room. Do you have a store room where I could keep it?”

Rex helped him take his stuff to his room and then they took a GI footlocker from Tim's pickup into the house. Rex turned on the lights in the store room and his eyes went to the dusty suitcase in the corner. He had almost forgotten that it was there. It was like a millstone had been dropped around his neck. Tim put the footlocker next to the suitcase and to Rex's surprise, Tim picked up the suitcase and sat if farther back into the corner.

"That's a surprise, its heavier then I expected"

"Paper records, the tax guy says that we have to keep them for seven years"

Two days later, Tim had his first flying lesson.

Rex was still bothered by the suitcase in the storeroom when the bank called to ask if he could do a job that day. They needed a contract signed by a client in Nevada and they couldn't wait for the mail. After a quick check of the distance on the map, he looked at his watch and said that he would have to leave within the hour. The bank said that they would have the contract to him in twenty minutes.

After checking the plane and calling Molly, he thought some more about the money from Kuwait. Back in his office, he took a sealed envelope from the office safe. In it was the \$100 bill that he had taken from the bank box. He had always wondered if it was legitimate and he thought that now was the time to find out.

When he landed in Nevada, the bank's client was waiting for him. The contract was quickly signed and Rex called for a gas truck to fill his plane. Across the street was a bright, neon sign that said 'Last Chance Casino'. He told the airport manager that he would be back in twenty minutes and that the fuel guy should top up his plane with gas.

In the casino Rex watched a gambler toss a \$100 bill on the Blackjack table and ask for chips. The dealer looked at the bill through the light and then marked it with a special pen. If the bill was counterfeit, the ink from the pen would change color.

Rex's hand was shaking when he tossed his Kuwaiti bill and asked for chips. If it was bad he would claim that he got it at the casino and then walk away. The dealer checked it and gave him four green chips. Rex bet one of the chips and won the hand. He went to the cashier's cage and cashed out for a hundred and twenty five dollars and then walked back to the airport. Now he was bothered more the ever. When he arrived he was just a thief and now he was a thief and money launderer. His situation was getting worse.

Dave Kelly – Fall 1996

Dave thought that the world was going his way. So far in his twenty-four years he had got everything that he wanted. He had graduated with a master's degree in accounting from Cal Berkeley just three months ago and he had just finished an awesome camping trip with his girlfriend Brittney. They had hiked and camped in the Rockies for four weeks, sleeping under the stars and dining on fat rainbow trout. He thought of the trip as his last hurrah before starting his career.

Brittney was a sassy girl with a degree in graphic arts and a great sense of humor. Despite wrinkled noses from his parents and stony cold acceptance from hers, they had rented an apartment in San Francisco and they were moving in together. "Living in sin" was what both mothers called it but to the newly-cohabiters it was just what young people did at the end of the twentieth century.

The morning of the first day of his new job was a nervous and exciting time for him. He took extra time showering and shaving and then dressing meticulously in a black business suit and a blue tie. Brittney greeted him at the breakfast table with a hug and kiss and a big yellow cardboard badge that said 'G-Man'. He was trying to be so serious but they both burst out laughing.

"Come on Brit, I'm not a G-Man"

"You're working for the FBI, what else would you call it?"

"I'm not a Special Agent, I'm an accountant."

"What's your title then?" she said with a smile.

"I'm an Associate Investigative Analyst ... hey that does sound impressive doesn't it?"

"You're my hero G-Man" she said as she kissed him again.

Tim Late fall 1996

The flying lessons had been a real treat for Tim. He was a good student and after he had soloed, he had a lot of time in the plane alone. He learned what pilots meant about the joy of just hanging in the sky. After a while he became familiar with the landmarks surrounding Redrock and he ventured farther away. One clear afternoon he flew over the farm land east of Redrock and took a look at a dusty town in the heart of the alfalfa and potato fields. He was surprised by a building with a round blue roof. Looking closer he recognized the familiar shape of a mosque. He had seen hundreds of them in Iraq but he didn't expect one in Montana. Later, Rex told him that Garden City was a Moslem community of farm workers. They were a mixed lot of Lebanese and Iraqis. He laughed and said that some of the farmers had probably shot at him and Tim in the gulf war.

The lessons had taken longer the Tim had thought, Montana weather wasn't very predictable and his instructor wasn't always available. Still he had his commercial now and he was flying bank documents back and forth to various cities about three days a week. The Cub's heater was nearly worthless and he needed a warmer coat.

One afternoon he went to the store room in the ranch house to get his heavy winter field jacket out of his footlocker. It was folded in the bottom of the box and he was sure that it would have Iraqi sand in the pockets. When he slipped it on, instead of sand, he found a pocket full of the small metal tubes that he had taken from the dump at Qwi.

He had forgotten that he had these little mysteries until now. That last day at Dirt City had been so hectic that he hadn't time to do anything with them. He wondered if they were really dangerous and that maybe he should never have touched them. He kept one in his pocket and put the rest back into the footlocker.

That afternoon, he went into the store room at the airport where Rex kept his National Guard gear. After looking through a box of combat haz-mat suits and gas masks he found the CBW reference manual. It had the description of every known gas and biological agent in use by anyone's military.

The only identification that was on the metal tube was 'B-271' and it didn't take Tim long to find the information. B-271 was an early Soviet binary gas. It was very deadly but also very short lived. After activation and exposure to the air, it was only viable for three to five minutes. The designers thought that it would be ideal for assault troops to use against buildings or bunkers. The idea was to send it into a building and five minutes later, it would be safe to enter and occupy.

Because the gas was binary, it was completely safe to ship and handle before it was exposed to an activator. In this case, the combat activator was hydrogen peroxide or in an emergency, just ordinary water. In actuality, the use of a liquid activator was not successful. It would freeze in cold weather and it was heavy and hard to carry. The Soviet army never deployed B-271 in the field but did sell it to several of their client states. In

the right conditions it could be very effective. One pellet exposed to one liter of activator would generate as much as 2500 cubic feet of gas.

Tim was amazed that he had carried such a deadly substance with him for so long without knowing it. He was curious and wondered if it had lost its potency after all of these years. Like a kid with a firecracker, he wanted to see if it still worked. Looking around the store room he found an old quart jar full of rusty bolts. He dumped the bolts into the trash and took the jar. He filled the jar with water and made sure that the lid fit tightly.

He didn't know exactly how he was going to test the gas but he knew that he needed to be a long way from town. He drove south for several miles and then turned on a dirt track that took him away from the road. He found a flat spot between the sage brush that was really quite pretty. There were lots of butterflies and birds in the area and he saw several cotton tailed rabbits scampering in front of him.

He had read that the gas had a two minute delay before it became active and after it was exposed to the activator so he set the open jar of water on the ground and twisted open the screw cap in the tube. There was one pellet in the tube that looked like a large Alka Seltzer tablet. He dropped the pill into the jar of water and screwed the lid on tight.

There was a gentle but steady breeze blowing from the west so he parked the truck pointed up wind and then threw rocks at the jar from about twenty feet away. The third rock broke the jar and he beat a hasty retreat in the truck. Looking back he was surprised how fast a white cloud of fog expanded from the puddle on the ground. He drove about a half mile upwind and waited a full thirty minutes before he ventured back to the broken jar.

There was no trace of the fog cloud but the ground downwind from the jar was littered with dead butterflies and a few birds. Tim walked about two hundred yards straight downwind and he counted six dead rabbits. At 250 yards there were no more dead butterflies. He did some quick calculations and decided that the gas should still be active up to about four hundred yards but it had dispersed out in the open so it was too diluted to kill after about a minute and a half.

“Damn!” Tim thought driving back to town. “How am I going to get rid of this stuff?”

FBI Regional Office, Miami Florida – 1999

“Excuse me sir but I might need your advice on this one.” The local agent said to his supervisor.

“What do you have, Rawlings, you usually don’t ask for help”

“The guys downstairs sent this to me because they didn’t know what to do with it. It seems that a guy in Lakeland sent us a letter about some suspicions that he has about some of his students. He runs a big flying school at Lakeland airport, you know, the kind that trains commercial pilots for the airlines.

Over the years he has trained a lot of foreign pilots so he’s used to dealing with the way they do business. Right now he has a group of ten Saudi students that he says aren’t like the others that have come through the school”

“Different in what way?”

“He says that most of his students are well educated, usual with degrees from American schools but the only thing that these guys seem to know is the Koran. He also says that they’re not really interested in learning systems and procedures. They just want to concentrate on flying. He says that they book lots of time on the Boeing 767 simulator but they almost never practice take off’s and landings”

“What do we know about the students?”

“They’ll all from Saudi Arabia and they all entered the US through Amsterdam.”

“Is there a CIA alerts on any of them?”

“Nothing”

“Well that doesn’t mean that they don’t have information on them. Send them an enquiry and see if anything turns up”

Wendy and the new millennium.

The summer of 2000 had been a wonderful time for Wendy. She had worked with her dad both at the airport and at the lodge at Nine Mile Lake. She was fourteen years old and had been spared the torments that puberty brought to many teenagers. She was just as sweet now as she had always been. In a couple of weeks she would start high school but before that she had three more days at the lake with her dad.

Of course she knew that Rex wasn't her real dad and that Molly wasn't her real mom but she didn't want to dwell on that. She had been bothered greatly for the last few years about her real parents and why they weren't in her life. Sometimes she had bad dreams where she found out that they were really very bad people and that they had come to take her away from Rex and Molly.

She barely remembered her aunt Nan who raised her when she was little. She had left when Windy was seven and she promised to come back and visit but she never did. The only thing that she left for Wendy was a birth certificate for Susan Marie Denials and a box with a Peter Pan outfit and a bracelet that had the name Wendy Darling on it. Wendy had read Peter Pan and she knew that Wendy Darling was the adopted mother of the Lost Boys in Neverland.

Wendy was eleven when questions about her birth parents started to bother her. She was old enough to know about kids being adopted and even abandoned. She imagined her birth mom giving her up because she was ugly or deformed or something. Wendy didn't feel ugly or deformed. She thought that her parents might be dead but if that were true why wasn't she with her grandparents or an aunt or uncle. These thoughts bothered her a lot.

She had finally got a hint about her life a couple of years ago when she talked to Nan on the telephone. The old lady told her that she really wasn't the daughter of her niece but of a girl that she had known in San Francisco. The girl had come to the ranch very sick with a little girl and the next day, she had asked Nan to take care of the baby while she went to the doctor. She had died that day and Nan had taken care of the baby just like she promised. The only thing that she had left from the baby was the clothes, bracelet and the birth certificate. When Wendy begged for more information, Nan just told her to be happy and hung up the phone.

Her mom, now, of course was wonderful. No child could be more loved. Her dad treated her special but he also gave her the freedom to learn and grow. She was never told that she was too young to try anything. That freedom led to a lot of scratched knees and bloody noses and one time it caused a broken arm.

She still remembered that when she first went to lived with mom and dad in the ranch house she had called them Uncle Rex and Aunt Molly. Soon she was calling Molly 'Mol' and one day she came running into the house and shouted "Mom, I'm home". Molly came to her with tears in her eyes and hugged her for a long time. It took a little while

longer to grow to love Rex, at first she called him Pops and later it became Dad. Just those two words brought them much closer together.

Having a dad who was a pilot led to a lot of time in the air and by now she could probably fly every airplane on the field. Of course she was never allowed to fly alone and wouldn't even be able to start official flying lessons for two more years but she was already a good pilot.

This summer Rex had trained her to make take-offs and landings from the water with their big Cessna 185 on floats. Rex used it to fly people back and forth to Nine Mile Lake. The floats were used for the lake and small wheels below the floats were used at the airport. Both she and Rex were very proud of what she had learned.

She had to use a cushion in the plane and when she drove the gas truck. She wasn't tall enough to see out otherwise. Her dad still laughs about the time that she drove the gas truck off the airport property and into the street. She just did it to turn around but Deputy Brown saw her. He put her in the police car and drove to Hamilton Aviation. He marched her into Rex's office and began his lecture.

"I know that it's legal for your daughter to drive the truck on private property but the streets of Redrock are a different story"

Rex had sat quietly while the deputy vented his frustration then he solemnly answered,

"Your right Deputy Dawg, do you want to pull down her pants and whip her now or should I do it?"

The deputy lost his composure and burst out laughing and he sat down and put his feet on Rex's desk. Rex took a dollar bill from his wallet and handed it to Wendy

"Here honey, run over to the snack bar and bring us three cokes, the long arm of the law needs to take a break"

The three day job at the lodge would be something new for Wendy. Usually there were three employees at the lodge. One was the cook while the other two were fishing guides. Wendy had spent two different weeks up there this summer working as the cook but because some of her dad's people were on vacation, she and Rex were going to act as both cook and guides for two clients. She was a good fisherman and she could drop a dry fly with the best of them. The reason that they needed two guides for just two fishermen was because one client was a fly fisherman and the other was a nature photographer. He would fish a little but he really wanted to spend most of his time in the moose marsh at the south end of the lake, so Wendy would fish while Rex and the photographer were swatting misquotes.

As soon as they returned from the lake her mom had a school clothes shopping trip planned to Helena. They would make the drive, go shopping, and stay the night in a hotel,

then more shopping the next day before the drive home. Wendy wasn't really interested in shopping but she really looked forward to two uninterrupted days with her mom.

Dave Kelly – March 2001

Dave Kelly was excited when he dialed Britney's cell phone.

“Hey Brit, I got it.”

“Really, you mean that you did all of that worrying for nothing?”

“Well it wasn't for nothing. The final report is due on the 6th and the boss said that I could take the 10th through the 14th off. With the weekends that will be seven glorious days in the mountains of Montana and by taking the red-eye Friday night we can spend six full days on the lake and still be home Sunday afternoon.”

“That sounds good to me, when are you going to call the reservations number?”

“In one minute sugar, are you up for Chinese tonight?”

”Mexican, I need tacos and lots of them”

FBI Regional Office, Seattle Washington – June 2001

“Have we seen anything like this before?” The Special Agent in Charge (SAIC) asked his subordinate.

“Not in this office sir but it might be happening somewhere else”

“Ok, let me get this straight, The chief instructor at this flight simulator in Tacoma thinks that this Arab guy is acting weird because he doesn’t want to practice take-off’s and landings?”

“Well sir, that’s not quite it. The student claims that he is training for a job as a flight engineer and his employer wants him to be able to fly enough to take over while the pilots go to the restroom. The instructor was an airline pilot for twenty year and he said that was the most ridicules thing that he had ever heard.”

“Ok, let’s check with Washington and see if there have been any other reports like this. In the mean time, learn what you can about the Arab and see if any bells go off”

FBI - Later.

“Ok, what the story on the wayward pilot?”

“Sir there was a similar report in Florida in ’99 but nothing ever came of it. There were ten Saudi students that didn’t seem interested in landing but they all graduated with no trouble. I have this guys records, his name is Sámi Askari and there’s nothing out of the ordinary except he’s a Saudi and he enter the US through Amsterdam. I’ve sent an enquiry to the CIA to see if they have anything on him”

“Good, lets just keep an eye on him for a while, that doesn’t mean surveillance but just check up on him weekly until we hear from the CIA”

CIA headquarters, Langley Virginia – July 2001

“Sir, the feds are asking about Askari, what should we tell them?”

“Did they say why they wanted to know?”

“Nothing, just asking if there is anything that they should know about him”

“Damn, they could really screw up the Amsterdam terrorist cell thing. If he gets a hint that the FBI is looking at him, he’ll call Holland and our efforts to get our man inside will go down the drain”

“What should we tell them?”

“Well if we ignore them they’ll move on him on their own. If we tell the truth, they’ll blow our job in Holland. I suppose that we could tell them that we know that he’s ok and then tell them the truth later, after our guys inside”

Tim Van Dam – August 2001

Tim was really sick but he didn't want anyone to know. He had done nothing for two weeks except fly bank documents between Redrock and Helena. At night he was too tired to go out so he sit in his tiny bunkhouse room and watched TV. Finally he asked Rex for a couple of days off and then he drove to the VA hospital in Helena.

For a while the government had actually started to admit that Gulf War Syndrome was real but some new directive must have come down from Washington because when he finally saw a doctor it was like he was starting all over again. Tim had hoped that the new Republican administration that had taken over in January would be more supportive of the military and at first they talked a lot about it but now all of the talk was about cutting taxes and cutting programs. One of Tim's biggest concerns was his FAA pilot's physical which would be due soon. Right now he didn't know if he could pass it.

Tim had intended to talk to the doctor about some blackouts that he had been experiencing for the last few months but after discussing his physical problems he realized that it would be a completely waste of time. When the blackouts first started he chalked them up to forgetfulness where he just lost periods of time. The first time that he noticed it was when he looked on the flight schedule and noticed that a weekly flight for the bank wasn't there. When he mentioned it to Rex he got a funny look and was told that he had made that flight the day before.

He hadn't been sleeping well and was bothered by bad dreams. He soon found that the blackouts and the dreams were related. One night he dreamed that he was in a fist fight with some shadowy figure and the next day he found his knuckles were skinned. Sometimes whole days disappeared and sometimes just minutes. He was bothered more and more by dreams of the gulf war and many of the dreams were about the gas canisters that he had in his footlocker. Often it was the Iraqis that were attacking him with the gas.

He spent two days going through a series of tests only to be told that the results wouldn't be ready for several days. He could make an appointment for the following week if he liked. Tim was so angry that he slammed out of the office and hit the road for Redrock. He was filled with the certainty that he would die of this illness and the doctors would claim that the cause was unknown.

As he drove away from the city he was surprised that he felt better. He had heard guys who had been in combat say that once you accepted that you weren't going to survive then things were easier. He turned on the radio and hummed along with the songs on the country music station. He wondered if his new feelings would cause the blackouts to disappear but he would have to wait and see about that.

Hamilton Aviation – September 2001

“Ok daughter dear, just one more job and then it’s back to school for you”

“Sure pop, this is my year, before next summer I’ll have my driver’s license and I’ll be taking flying lessons”

“A lot of good that’ll do you, you don’t have a car and you can’t drive the gas truck to school so what are you going to do for wheels?”

“No problem, mom said that you should get a new pickup and give me your old one”

“Mom said that?”

“Yes sir and, as we know, what mom wants, mom gets”

“You’re a silly girl”

“Yes but I’m your silly girl”

“Yes you are ..., ok here’s the deal for next week. The two guys from St. Louis cancelled but that couple from San Francisco is still coming. With just the two of them I told Pete that we didn’t need him. I guess that the guy is a real fly fisherman but his wife or girlfriend or what ever wants to fish a little and sight-see, take some pictures and just be lazy.”

“That’s ok dad, I’ll get the guy a trophy Cutthroat and you show the girl the moose swamp.”

“Well I don’t want you in that swamp with some helpless girl so that’s what we’ll do I guess. Do you want the know something interesting? This guy listed his job on the contract as FBI, what do you think about that?”

“Cool pop, a real G-Man”

About one o’clock on Saturday, September 9th, Dave and Britney arrived at the airport in their rented Ford Taurus. Rex and Wendy helped them load their gear into the Cessna and then they were in the air heading for Nine-Mile Lake. Dave and Brit sat in the back and marveled at the beauty of the approaching mountains but he was a little surprised to see that the young girl did the flying while the pilot sat and relaxed.

The plane climbed quite high to get through a pass in the mountains and then cut back on the power and descended towards a sparkling blue lake. Rex and Wendy smiled as they flew low past the moose swamp and headed towards the lodge on the north shore. The costumers were always amazed at the beauty of the place and they said so. Dave was a little relieved when the pilot took the controls for the water landing which was as smooth as glass.

He had seen pictures of the lodge on the brochure and it looked familiar. The float plane was tied up at a short dock and the gear was unloaded. Wendy started lunch while Rex put the gear into their room. Dave broke out a short spinning rod and within five minutes he had caught and released several small trout from the dock. He just knew that this was going to be a week that he would never forget.

FBI Regional Office, Seattle Washington – September 9, 2001

“GOD DAMN IT, those bastards have known this for months. The god damned CIA just sent us an alert on Sámi Askari. He was in a god damned Al-Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan in 1996. Agent Green, get some surveillance on this guy right now”

9/10/01- 7:18 am - Seattle

The radio in the FBI’s supervisor car came alive,

“He’s on the move. A cab just picked him up and their driving towards the freeway now”

“Roger that, what’s the cab’s company and number?”

“Yellow Cab, number 276”

9/10/01- 7:23 am - Seattle

“Chase-1, he’s going to the airport, Chase-2, you intercept and follow the guy at SeaTac”

9/10/01- 7:25 am – Seattle

“Air-Data, what have you got for a Sámi Askari out of SeaTac this morning?”

“Wait a minute ... Ok, Ok, he’s on United 914 to Boston at 9:05 ... a one way ticket”

9/10/01- 8:22 am – SeaTac airport

“Air-Watch-2, do you have him in sight?”

“Yea, he’s checked in and he’s standing in the boarding area but the guy looks antsy as hell. He’s looking over his shoulder or looking at his watch every ten seconds ... hold on ... he saw something that he didn’t like ... he’s walking away from the area and he’s moving fast ...”

“Keep him in sight”

9/10/01- 8:31 am - SeaTac airport

“Do you still have him?”

“Yea I’m fifteen feet away. The guy just paid cash for a one way ticket to Boston on Air Canada 221 leaving at 10:22. ... Hey I need some help here ... he’s walking to the big restroom on level two and there are four exits out of there”

9/10/01- 8:34 am - SeaTac airport

“This is Air-Watch-4, he’s gone down the escalator to Arrivals and it looks like he’s renting a car from Hertz.”

9/10/01- 10:08 am – On Interstate 5 driving north towards then Canadian border.

“Any change Chase-1?”

“No he’s just following the traffic. I wonder why he rented a Jeep Cherokee?”

“No idea, its four-wheel drive, maybe he’s going off-road”

“Hold it ... he just took the Blaine exit and he did it at the last minute. Chase-2, get up here he may have made me”

9/10/01- 10:17am – Farm road 100 yards south of the Canadian border.

“Air-1 do you have him in sight?”

“Roger that, I can see him and Chase-2 and the Canadian Mounties. Ok, look out, he’s on the move, he’s going straight across the raspberry field and he’s nearly to the Canadian border. He thinks that he’s got it made but I can see that the Mounties are waiting for him.”

9/10/01-7:36 pm FBI Regional Office, Seattle

The Special Agent in Charge was on the phone to Washington.

“Yes sir, we have him. What do you want us to do now?”

He talked for a few minutes and then hung up.

“Ok Peters, you’re on the plane with him tomorrow morning. I asked the Director for the Gulfstream but it’s not available so you’re on the earliest commercial flight that you can get. Maybe after we get rid of this guy, life around here will return to normal”

9/11

Nine Mile Lake - 6:30 am

Dave was looking forwards to another beautiful day on the lake. He had fished with Rex the day before and they had done very well with medium size cutthroats but today he was with Wendy and she had laughingly told him that she knew where the big ones were.

He had been a little apprehensive about paying so much money for the trip only to find that one of the guides was a fifteen year old girl but that was behind him now. Wendy turned out to be a very capable and knowledgeable guide. Besides that, she was funny and friendly. Britney accused him of flirting with the girl but then changed her mind and accused the girl of flirting with Dave. The reality was that they both enjoyed the others company.

Before they left the lodge, Wendy checked his choice of gear. His rod was the heaviest that he had brought but she wasn't happy with his selection of flies.

"Well Mr. Kelly, these maybe alright for Sierra rainbows but if your going for big cutthroats you need big streamer flies. She opened her fly box and showed him huge feathered lures. In the water this will look like a six inch trout.

"Ok Wendy but it'll take me a while to tie something that big."

"Use these, ok Mr. Kelly?"

"Ok but if your going to ridicule my flies you should call me Dave, Ok?"

"Ok Dave, lets get going, its quarter to seven already"

Hamilton Ranch - 6:51 am

Molly sat down with a cup of coffee and turned the TV to the morning news, the first thing that she heard was that the program was being interrupted for breaking news.

Rattlesnake Canyon Road – 6:54 am

Tim was trying to get the country music program on the pickup radio and he was a little miffed that all he could hear was talking. Something got his attention and he stopped dialing to listen.

"... hit the North tower of the World Trade Center at 8:46 Eastern Daylight Time this morning. Every available unit of the New York Fire Department has responded and so far, no assessment of casualties has been released. We will bring you more information as it becomes available."

As the music came back on the radio Tim wondered how a plane could fly into something as big as an office building. He thought that the weather must be really bad on the east coast.

Hamilton Ranch – 7:02 am

Molly was horrified by the picture on her TV. Smoke was pouring from the upper floors of the WTC and the announcer had just said that the plane that had hit the building was an American Airlines flight from Boston to Los Angeles that had been hijacked. She wished that Rex and Wendy were with her but there was no way to contact them. Even if the radio in the plane was turned on, they couldn't get a signal until they were in the air.

Suddenly the voices on the TV sounded frantic and she saw a second plane flying towards the building. She watched in horror as the plane flew directly into the south tower sending a wave of flames all the way through and out the other side.

On the streets of Redrock – 7:03 am

Tim's mind was reeling with the news on the radio. Without thinking he instinctively wanted to be with people like him. He drove to the bar at the VFW hall which usually wasn't open in the morning but when he arrived there were several cars in the parking lot and the door was opened. These guys were all ex GI's from America's past wars and they understood each other. The bartender was making coffee and the big screen TV told the story of the attack on the WTC.

Nine Mile Lake – 9:10 am

Both Dave and Wendy were laughing as they found a log just above the beach and sat down for a break. Dave had pictures on Britney's digital camera of an eight pound monster that he had caught and an eleven pound, bigger monster, that Wendy had snaked out of the mouth of a creek that ran into the lake. Both fish were now swimming in the cold water of the lake and were probably wondering what had happened to them that morning. Wendy had brought a thermos of coffee in the canoe and they were enjoying it.

Redrock VFW hall – 6:45 pm

Tim had spent the entire day watching the events unfold. He was shocked by the collapse of both WTC towers and by the attack on the pentagon. Like everyone, he wondered where the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania had been going and why it had gone down in an empty field. He thought that maybe the hijack pilot just couldn't handle the big Boeing 757.

Like the rest of the vets in the bar, he was mad as hell. There were shouts about getting even and there was talk about driving over to the Moslem community at Garden City. "BURN THE BASTERDS OUT!!!" Someone shouted.

“Hell, their just farmers they don’t have anything to do with this” a cooler hard said.
“HOW DO WE KNOW!!!!? BETTER SAFE THEN SORRY!!!”

Hamilton Ranch – 8:20 pm

Molly turned off the TV. She had all of the emotion that she could stand for one day. She had thought about calling Tim Van Dam at the airport and asking him to fly up to Nine Mile Lake and tell Rex what was happening but then she heard that all aviation had been grounded so there was nothing that she could do except suffer alone.

A knock on the door interrupted her thoughts and she was surprised to see Tim at her door.

“Oh Tim what a terrible day, Rex isn’t here”

“Yes Mrs. Hamilton, I guess that he doesn’t know anything about the attack”

“Well the way that I feel it’s probably a good thing, what can I do for you Tim?”

“I need to get some things out of the storage room, I’ll just be minute”

Nine Mile Lake – 9:45 pm

“What a great day, I caught two of the biggest trout of my life and it doesn’t matter that the biggest fish of the day was caught by my fifteen year old guide.”

Dave was still showing Rex and Britney the pictures on the little screen of the digital camera.

“Well you can catch more tomorrow but I’m taking the camera. Rex and I are going to the swamp and I’m going to take a picture of a moose if it takes all day”

“That’s ok with me but September 11, 2001 will always be one of the best days of my life”.

Tim later that night

Tim had a savior headache when he returned to his room in the bunkhouse. He found a bottle of pills that the VA had given him and took two of them. He had tried to remain calm while he was talking to Mrs. Hamilton but now he was in a rage. Most of his anger was directed towards the government for their policies towards veterans and for not finishing what they had started in the gulf war.

The attacks on his country had been carried out by the same Moslems that he had fought in Iraq. He felt that if his government hadn't been so weak and noncommittal in 1990 they wouldn't be where they were now.

He thought about Garden City and the nest of terrorists that must be there now. Tomorrow they could poison the water in Redrock or use suicide bombers to blow up school buses. His head was pounding and he took several more pills from the bottle.

His dreams were tortured and bazaar. He was fighting Arabs who were armed with AK-47's and gas grenades. His army commander was shouting for him to find their ammo dump and blow it up. Looking at the clock he saw that it was 3am. It was time for him to go on his reconnaissance patrol.

Tim loaded the things that he had brought from the storage room into his pickup and drove into the dark night. It was forty five miles to Garden City and he saw an enemy patrol in every shadow. He kept his eyes on the rearview mirror to guard against ambush from behind.

The dusty shantytown was dark and silent when he drove in with his lights off. There were no streetlights to help him avoid the potholes in the dirt street and he was afraid that the enemy would hear his pickup jolting through the bumps. He parked beside a large barn at the edge of town and walked into the darkness. After a few minutes he stood by a water trough and listened to a flock of sheep stirring in the night. He was sure that he was hearing an enemy camp of resting soldiers. Checking that the breeze was blowing from behind him, he unscrewed the cap from a gas cartridge and dropped the pellet into the water. Quickly and silently he made for the pickup and trying not to panic he drove out of town.

Twenty miles from Garden City Tim knew that he should report what had happened. There was a closed gas station with a pay phone at the road junction and he called 911.

"911 Operator, what is your emergency?"

"Something has happened in Garden City, something bad"

"Pardon me sir, do you speak English?"

Tim realized that he had spoken in Arabic.

"Something bad has happened in Garden City" he said, this time in English and he hung up.

The sky was turning pink when he drove to all night grocery store near the airport. He bought some snacks and several bottles of water. The clerk looked at him with a puzzled smile when he paid for a case of quart mason jars.

“Planning on making jam?” the kid asked with a smile.

“Moonshine” Tim answered with the same smile.

Once inside the Hamilton Aviation hanger at the airport he felt safe but he knew that he couldn’t stay long. He had seen the two police cars go by with their red lights on and there sirens blasting. He had pulled to the side of the road to make room for them and then he went on his way.

In the office he sat and maybe napped for a few minutes when the savage dreams attacked his mind. The airliners hit the buildings and the fire blasted all the way through but this time he wasn’t watching on TV, he was in the WTC tower and he was trying to escape. He was being chased by Arabs in robes and turbans and they had come from Garden City.

He knew that they would catch him if he stayed where he was so he had to find a safe place to prepare for his attack on them. He loaded the things from the pickup into the Cub and got some other things from the back room. Even though there was a ban on civilian flight there was no one at the airport who would or could stop him. There were always people who hadn’t got the word or who just didn’t care. He was sure that the crop dusters would be flying and if they were stopped they would claim ignorance.

Once in the air, Tim had time to think about a safe place to get ready for his attack. The most isolated place that he could think of was Nine Mile Lake.

Nine Mile Lake – September 12, 2001

The morning was clear and chilly. There was a touch of fall in the air and the Aspen trees high on the mountain above the lake were defiantly turning yellow. Britney was ready for her trip to the moose swamp and Wendy was kidding her and Rex about the trophy size mosquitoes that they would encounter.

“What are you and Mr. Kelly doing this morning?” Rex asked.

“We’re going to try for a big fish at the mouth of Rush Creek. We looked at it yesterday and the creek is really full now.”

“You be careful of the drop off that near the beach. It’ll be a cold walk back to the lodge if you fall in and soak yourself.”

The canoe trip the moose swamp would take nearly an hour so Rex and Britney left before Wendy and Dave had finished breakfast.

“Dave, dad said that you work for the FBI?”

“That’s right but not in the way that you think”

”Aren’t you a G-Man with a gun and a badge?”

Dave laughed. Everyone thought that all employees of the FBI were a special agent.

“No, I’m an investigator, an accountant. I look for the bad guys by looking at their business books. It’s not very exciting but I still catch my share of crooks”

“If the FBI wanted to find someone and they had just their name, could they do it?”

“Probably, who do you want to catch? Has your boyfriend done something wrong and you’re after him?”

“Nope, I don’t have a boyfriend. Where would I find time for a boyfriend?”

“Something made you ask the question”

Wendy told him about her lack of parents and the mystery of where she came from. She didn’t really want to find her birth parents as much as wanting to know about them and why they were gone.

“Well it’s not my area in the bureau but I might get a favor from a guy that I know. Here, write down your full name and the dates that you know about and I’ll see what I can do”

Rush creek was about two miles from the lodge and Wendy drove them most of the way in the jeep. The creek poured into the lake creating whitecaps where the stream and lake collided. There were often floating branches and tree limbs to interfere with the fisherman and it wasn’t easy fishing but Dave knew that the rewards would be worth it.

Wendy warned him not to wade very far into the lake because of the drop off but the only thing on Dave’s mind was a trophy size cutthroat, maybe even something over fifteen pounds.

Dave cast his huge fly for over an hour and was about to suggest a change of location when his fly was hit by a fright train. The line went smoking off of his reel as the big fish ran for deeper water. He saw the huge splash and just caught sight of the big, square tail

in the spray as his floating fly line disappeared into the lake and was quickly being followed by a hundred yards of the backup line.

Holding the tip of his rod as high as he could to prevent the fish from breaking his leader he became aware the Wendy was shouting at him and that she had a tight grip on the back of his belt. To keep the trophy trout from stripping all of his line he had waded into the lake and the water was nearly up to his pockets.

“BACK UP!! BACK UP!! DROP OFF!!! DROP OFF!!!”

Just as the logic of what she was saying sank into his adrenalin soaked brain, the cold water closed over his head. He was fighting for footing on the gravel bottom as he realized that the fly rod was no longer in his hand. Completely panicked he was trying to find a breath when Wendy dragged him into shallow water. They were both down on their knees and up to their chins in the lake when he finally calmed down. He looked at her, soaking wet with her hair in her eyes and laughed. She looked exasperated but she finally smiled and splashed water into his face.

They both found a grassy spot just off the lake and sat down. They were still laughing when Wendy asked,

“How much did that carbon fiber rod cost?”

“It was too much, \$300.”

“Did it have a floating handle?”

“I think so”

“Well, we’ll probably find it down the beach but before we look, I need some dry clothes”

Still catching their breath Wendy looked up and listened. In the distance they could hear an airplane engine. Dave had got used to the silence of the lake and the noise sounded alien. Wendy stood and was looking for the source of the noise when she saw a blue Super Cub skim over the trees and disappear towards the landing strip in the clearing.

“That’s our Cub. Van Dam must be flying, let’s change clothes and go see what brings him up here”

Tim tried to avoid the lodge at the end of the lake as he approached the small strip in the meadow. He knew that the lodge was once occupied by his people but he was sure that the enemy had it now. He would have to get in and out of the clearing as quick as possible.

Once on the ground he quickly changed his clothes and took the box of mason jars to the little stream at the end of the landing strip. He filled each jar with water and then dropped a gas pellet into it. He made doubly sure that the lid was screwed on very tight before he filled the next jar.

He had just stowed the jars next to the seat on the cub when he heard the enemy patrol approaching. He saw the jeep coming through the trees and just as it emerged into the

sunlight he fired his pistol at it. It was over a hundred yards away and he knew that it would be just luck if he hit it but it would get their attention.

The jeep stopped and then backed up quickly into the trees. Tim was in the Cub and without closing its pull-up door he had it started and was racing down the strip. He had no time to turn into the wind and took off downwind. He willed the tough little plane to lift over the trees at the end of the field and then he was looking right at the mountain. He had to turn and fly back over the enemy patrol.

Still with just minimum altitude he skimmed the trees as he headed back towards the lake where he saw the jeep and two enemy soldiers beside it. As he flew over their heads and expecting a rifle bullet any second, he threw a gas jar through the open door. Then he was over the lake and climbing towards the mountain pass. At a hundred miles an hour he would be over the enemy's camp at Garden City in just over an hour.

Wendy had driven Dave to the lodge and they had both changed into dry clothes. Her plan was to go to the landing strip and then to take a canoe to look for Dave's lost fishing rod. It was a beautiful day and as they drove along the wooded track she was chatting with Dave about the 'Big one that got away'. As they emerged into the meadow they saw the blue Cub and a man beside it. They both realized that something was wrong. The figure beside the plane was wearing an army camouflage suit with a full face gas mask. Dave recognized the suit from his FBI training as a combat Bio-Hazard suit. They were worn by soldiers when they were attacked with gas or biological weapons.

“WENDY STOP!!!”

She slammed on the breaks as the figure raised a pistol and fired. As the bullet kicked up dust twenty yards in front of the jeep Wendy shoved the gear shift into reverse and spun the tires as they raced backwards into the cover of the trees. The Cub was racing away downwind when she pulled forward and they got out. She expected the little plane to crash into the trees at the end of the field because it was going off downwind but somehow it cleared the top branches. Now she expected it to crash into the quickly rising ground as it headed towards the mountain but again it skimmed the trees and turned towards them.

Dave was beside the girl as the plane climbed straight over them. At the last minute it occurred to him that the pilot might shoot at them but when it was nearly straight overhead he saw something fall from the plane. Whatever it was it hit the ground well beyond them and a sudden cloud of white fog burst from the spot where it hit.

A flock of black birds was startled by the impact and leaped into the air. As they watched, the birds that flew through the fog dropped from the air as if they had been shot. Wendy realized the danger before Dave did and she shoved him into the jeep and then sped away towards the other end of the meadow.

“My god, is that insect spray or weed killer or something?”
“No Wendy, I think that it might be war gas”
“Do you mean because of that suit that the guy was wearing?”
“Exactly. Damn, I wish your dad was here, we need to follow that guy and warn the authorities, he means to kill someone just like he tried to kill us”
“Dave, I can fly the plane”
“What?”
“I can fly that plane. I do it all of the time”
“I can’t take you after that guy, he shot at us”
“DAVE!!!”
“Ok, the wind’s blown that fog away from the lake. Let’s go”

They raced to the dock and Wendy had the engine started and they were powering over the water. Dave looked at his watch and estimated that the cub had a ten or twelve minute head start on them.

“Can you catch him after his head start?”
“We’re sixty miles an hour faster than he is but we can’t catch him if we don’t know where he’s going”
“How soon can we use the radio?”
“When we’re through the pass”

Rex had heard the cub fly over the lake and he was wondering who would be flying in today. He knew that the Department of Fish and game landed here when they wanted to check the lake and he knew that they flew Super Cubs.

They were deep in the swamp and he would like to have started back to the lodge to check on the visitor but Britney was intent on getting some good pictures of a mother moose and her calf that were feeding on water lilies. About ten minutes later he heard the Cessna engine start and race into the air. Now he was very concerned. There had to be a serious emergency for Wendy to have flown the plane out of there without him. Britney knew that he was worried and she didn’t say a word when they abandoned the moose hunt and headed for the canoe.

As they cleared the pass Dave asked who they should call on the radio. He told her that he had a special FBI identification code that would get them in touch with his people but he had to give the code to the FAA somehow. Wendy selected the air emergency frequency and handed him the microphone.

Dave was surprised when the first person that he talked to asked what they were doing in the air, didn’t they know that all civilian flights had been grounded. His code number got them passed up the ladder to a supervisor and he quickly explained the incident at the lake. Wendy and asked if the controllers had the cub on radar and before the supervisor

switched them to a new frequency he said that there was an unauthorized plane eighteen miles ahead and he gave Wendy the bearing.

After two more frequency changes Dave was talking to an FBI controller that had the authority to get things done. The agent double checked Dave's identity and then told him about the incident that had happened in Garden City that morning.

Wendy had a chart on her lap and she drew a line on it from their location and along the bearing that the controllers had given them. She showed the line to Dave, it led directly to Garden City.

“Ok, Kelly, here's the deal, we have a team of people on the ground right now in Garden City. We've ordered an evacuation of the town until we figure out what's going on there. Our first thought was that someone there had made a gas bomb and it had gone off and we're looking hard at those people to see if any of them are terrorists.”

Wendy touched Dave's arm and pointed out the windshield. There on the horizon she could see the cub about two miles ahead.

The FBI controller gave Dave a frequency to contact the Special-Agent-In-Charge on the ground in Garden City. After some brief words, the agent asked if there was anyway that Dave could stop the guy in the cub. Dave started to explain that they had no weapons with them when Wendy pulled a short army carbine out from under the seat.

“It's not a rifle, it's just a pellet gun but it looks like a rifle and that guy won't know the difference”

After some discussion with the agent on the ground they agreed that their first plan was to get the other pilots attention by showing him the gun and to get him to land away from the town. Dave said that their second plan should be that all of the FBI people on the ground should get well upwind from the town.

Wendy eased the Cessna up beside the cub while Dave folded the window on his side up against the bottom of the wing. When the other pilot noticed the Cessna Dave held up the pellet gun. The cub immediately banked away and dove towards the ground to gain speed. Wendy surprised Dave by turning with the cub and staying very close although now they were above and a little behind the other plane. In the distance Wendy could see the little town.

“See if you can get him to turn away from the town” Dave said to her. He had completely forgotten that his capable pilot was a high school sophomore who was looking forwards to her first school dance. She eased the Cessna over the top of the cub and they could see the pilot through the Plexiglas panel above his head. The other pilot looked up and again dove away but almost immediately came back on course for Garden City. They were less than two minutes flying time from the town now.

Wendy was now flying beside and slightly behind the cub. She wanted to spook him away from the town but she didn't want to risk a collision. She opened her throttle and pulled a little ahead. As she came into his view the Cub pilot turned in his seat and fired his pistol. The shot struck their windshield just in front of Dave who was hit in the face by the bullet or pieces of the windshield or both. Wendy was looking toward Dave when she saw the cub hit the ground that was less than a hundred feet below. Keeping the crash in sight she saw a cloud of white fog burst from the wreckage and start to drift towards the town.

“RUN!! RUN!! GAS!! THERE'S GAS IN THE AIR!!!” she screamed into the microphone.

Wendy made a very steep bank around to where she could see the gas cloud. The FBI agent on the ground told her that they were clear of the town and the he could see that the gas was dissipating. He asked what had happened to Dave.

“I'll tell you in a minute ... I hope”

Dave woke to lights and noise and a sensation of great speed. He could only see out of one eye and what he could see didn't make much since. He tried to speak and that seemed to set off a flurry of activity. His blurred vision improved enough for him to make out the face of a pretty young girl with freckles on her nose and tears streaming down her face. That was immediately replaced by a man in a white uniform with a concerned look. Now he knew that he was in an ambulance and they were going somewhere very fast. He felt a pinprick in his arm and blackness closed out the light and sound.

Nine Mile Lake September 12 – 9:45 pm

Rex had made dinner for Britney and himself and they ate in silence. He couldn't stop thinking about the events of the day. He had no idea why his daughter had left in the Cessna and he had no clue why she hadn't come back for them. He knew that Britney was just as worried about Dave and he felt completely helpless. He had actually looked into buying a satellite phone so that he could keep in touch with Molly while he was at the lake but the \$1200 price tag had put him off. He would give a lot more for the phone right now. Finally Britney couldn't stay quiet any longer.

“Are you sure that there is no way that we can get some news from outside? Can't we radio to one of the airliner flying overhead and find out what's happened?”

Rex thought that it was a very good question,

“We could Mrs. Kelly but the radio is in the Cessna and it's gone. If someone doesn't come in the morning, I'll drain the gas out of the generator and we will drive the jeep out to the highway. It's a very rough trail and I'm not really sure that we can get through, it depends on how much snow is left in our way.”

“What if we can’t get through?”

“We’ll come back here I guess, what else can we do?”

“What if someone comes for us after we’ve left, couldn’t we get stuck between the preverbal rock and a hard place?”

“Yes we could, let’s just hope that someone comes in the morning.”

Dave woke up in a hospital room with a bandage over one side of his head and a splitting headache and it took him a minute to realize that he wasn’t alone. Wendy was curled up asleep in the chair besides his bed and a woman, probably the girl’s mother, was dozing in the other chair. The clock on the wall said that it was 1:15 and he assumed that it was am and not pm. When he reached for his water glass Wendy snapped awake.

“Welcome back Mr. Kelly”

“Dave, I don’t call you Miss Daniels or Hamilton or whatever, is Britney here?”

“No Dave, she’s with my dad at the lake. The Fish and Game people will get them in the morning”

“Well I hope that he knows that she doesn’t like to wash dishes”

The woman in the other chair was standing beside Wendy and she introduced herself,

“Mr. Kelly, I’m Molly Hamilton and we have been very worried about you”

“Nice to meet you Mrs. Hamilton, your daughter was very brave today and you should be proud of her”

“I don’t know what she did today and she won’t tell me. Maybe you can enlighten me”

Wendy looked at Dave and gave a tiny shake of her head. Dave was confused but he went along.

“I’m not sure myself. Maybe my head will be clearer in the morning”

A man in a black suit came in and Dave would have bet the farm on him being an FBI agent. He asked Molly if she would give them a few minutes and asked her to have a cup of coffee in the cafeteria while he chatted with her daughter and the patient.

When they were alone he closed the door and introduced himself to Dave and Wendy,

“Joe Blakemore, SAIC, Helena, I’d say that you two had a hell of a day”

After shaking hands with Dave and Wendy then he got down to business. The first thing that he did was to bring them up to speed on the 911 attack. Wendy had already heard most of it from her mom but it was a complete shock to Dave.

“Look I’ve got to tell you that everything that you did today is not for publication. There are bad people out there and we don’t know who they all are. I know that it’s asking too much for you not to tell your wife and parents but for the security of the country you have to let it go no farther. Now let me tell you that you are both heroes and someday maybe the world will know but today, just keep it to yourself. Kelly, your eyes are full of questions, what can I tell you?”

“Did the guy bomb the town?”

“No, Missy here stopped him”

“Who is he?”

“I won’t tell you who he was but I can tell you that under that Bio-hazard suit he was wearing a US Army uniform complete with ribbons and decorations. He wasn’t on active duty and hadn’t been for several years”

“Was it Tim Van Dam?” Wendy asked.

“Sorry, I can’t say”

“The last thing that I remember, we were trying to get him to turn away from Garden City and Wendy was flying very close to him, how did I get hit in the face and how did I get here?”

Blakemore looked at Wendy,

“You didn’t tell him?”

“No sir”

“The guy put a .45 caliber round through the windshield of the Cessna and the broken Plexiglas smacked you in the face. As the guy banked away his wingtip caught the ground. A gas cloud blew over the town from the crash but your pilot had warned the agents on the ground to get clear. You were bleeding like the preverbal stuck pig and Missy here landed the plane on a gravel road between two potato fields. The road was only eight feet wider than the wheels on your plane. One of our pilots said that it was the best piece of airmanship that he had ever seen.”

The agent said that he would be back the next day and the he would go and tell Mrs. Hamilton that she could come back to the room. After he left Wendy sat on the edge of Dave’s bed and put her hand on his arm.

“I broke the Cessna, Dave, one of the floats is messed up and dad’s going to be pissed. They said that I was a hero and I was so scared, Dave I was so scared that I wet my pants, please don’t tell anyone, the guy crashed, he just flew into the ground, I know that it was Tim Van Dam, I didn’t like him much but I didn’t want him dead, I didn’t kill him did I , I hope that I didn’t kill him, I’m glad that your alive, I’m glad that we’re both alive, I really like you and I had a great time fishing with you even if you did nearly drowned both of us, Dave I want to see my dad so bad, I can’t wait until the F&G brings him back tomorrow, ...”

She was interrupted when her mom walked in and wondered why her daughter was crying.

Redrock Airport September 13 8:45 am

Rex and Britney climbed out of the F&G Cessna and looked around. There was the Hamilton Aviation float plane sitting sadly on a flatbed truck with its wings off. He saw the damaged float and wondered how his pilot daughter could have made such a bad landing. He would have the chance to ask her because she was running towards them at that very minute.

Hamilton Ranch later that day

An FBI agent had met Rex at the airport and explained that he needed to collect Tim Van Dam's things from the ranch. Rex still found it hard to believe that his friend and employee had been involved in such a bazaar event but, as Rex was realizing, these were bazaar times.

With Molly clinging to his arm he watched the agent remove every item from Tim's bunkhouse room and then ask if there were any more of his belonging on the property. Rex led him to the store and pointed to the footlocker. The dreaded suitcase was sitting just behind.

"Anything else?" the agent asked.

"That's his suitcase" Rex indicated with his heart pounding.

The agent gathered it up and soon all traces of Tim Van Dam were disappearing down the road and out of Rattlesnake Canyon.

As soon as they were alone, Rex, Molly and Wendy cuddled on the couch and held each other. Wendy was crying and Molly was sobbing but unseen by the others, Rex was smiling as the burden of the money from the Bank of Kuwait disappeared from his mind.

FBI regional office Helena Montana September 15 – 9:45 AM

“Thanks Kelly. For a bean counter you did a hell of a job. If you ever want to cross over to the dark side I’ll give you a good recommendation for Special Agent”

“No thanks sir, a man needs to know his limitations but in a few years Wendy would make a great agent”

“I’ll bet that she would but I have a feeling that she will aspire to greater things, I wish that she was my daughter, I’m proud of her now and I hardly know her”

“Oh, before I go I have a favor to ask”

He told the SAIC Wendy’s story of her curiosity about her parents. He gave Blakemore the note that he had written at the lake with her birth certificate information and the description of the Peter Pan playsuit and the Wendy Darling bracelet.

“Would you see what you can find on this and let me know, I told her that I’d see what I could do”

“No problem Kelly, I’ll call when I get something”

Dave & Britney in San Francisco – September 28, 2001

The weeks following the 911 attack had been frantic for Dave. The Bureau suddenly had hundreds of leads on terrorists or suspected terrorist or people who might have know someone who may have been in the Middle East sometime. It was impossible to separate the valid leads from the lunatic fringe.

His last assignment had been to look at the finances of a charity that was suspected of providing supplies to an illicit organization in Pakistan. He spent a day finding that the Mormon Church was guilty of making baby quilts and sending them to an orphanage in Karachi. When he typed his final assessment he thought that it sounded ludicrous in its official language.

When he got home Britney wasn't very sympathetic but she did get him a cold beer with some tortilla chips and salsa. Their happy hour was interrupt by a phone call from the FBI's Helena office.

“Hey Kelly, how's life after the excitement in Montana?” SAIC Blakemore asked.
“Hectic sir, probably just like it is in your office”
“Well we're busy but I did have time to do that favor that you ask for and it's a bigger deal then we expected.

The first thing that we learned was that our girl Wendy isn't Susan Maria Denials. That little girl was killed in a car wreck along with her parents in '89. It's our suspicion that a Naomi Rivers obtained a copy of that girl's birth certificate from a clerk that somehow forgot to ask for identification. We've sent that information to the Montana State Attorney's office but I doubt that they'll pursue it.

The Peter Pan suit and the bracelet lead us to a kidnapping/missing person case in California. In 1991 a Mary Lou Bryan, age two, was taken by her junky mother and they both disappeared into the great unknown. The little girl was in the custody of her maternal grandparents at the time and they had a restraining order against their daughter. It isn't clear if there was a kidnapping or a misunderstanding but the grandparents wanted the girl back.

Anyway, we followed the story that this 'Aunt Nan' told Wendy and the hospital confirmed that a Jane Doe did die of an overdose in '91 and they had her fingerprints in their records. The junky daughter had been arrested several times in San Francisco and guess what, the fingerprints matched.

So Dave, you did a good job in helping clear up an old case, the other news is that you and I are the bad guys who are tearing a fifteen year old sweetie from her loving parents and giving her to a seventy year old couple that are complete strangers to her.”

“Oh my god, sir, do they really want to take her away from the only life that she's known?”

“Oh yea, not only do they want her, they want her right now.”

“Is there anyway that I can talk to them?”

“Well you know that officially I can’t tell you that they are Frank and Marge Bryan who live on Sea View Street in San Francisco and who are listed in the local phone book but before you do something why don’t you call her Montana parents to see if anything can be done.”

“Thanks for the info sir, I wished that I hadn’t ask the favor now”

“Ok Kelly, good luck and if you find out anything, will you let me know?”

A call to Redrock confirmed that Wendy, or Mary Lou as her grandparents call her, had indeed been taken to San Francisco by her grandparents. Rex and Molly were in touch with her daily by email but they didn’t know how long that would last. When the Hamilton’s had met with the elder Bryan’s they had ask about visiting and perhaps Christmas and summer vacations but the answer and been a rather icy ‘We’ll see’.

Dave asked if they would email his phone number, email and home address to Wendy and asked her to contact him anytime if he could help.

“She was very impressed with you Dave. She said that you are ‘very cool’.”

“I was the one who was impressed, if I had thought that I was putting her in danger I ... well ... you know, I can’t talk about that ... but she was really great ... someone to be proud of”

Dave & Britney – October 13, 2001

Dave was taking advantage of the first Saturday that he hadn't worked since 911 to catch up on some chores. They had a leaky faucet in the bathroom and he had gone to Home Depot for a part. He had worn a suit and tie for so many hours in the last month that his ragged jeans and a Rolling Stones T-shirt felt like bliss.

"Hey Brit, I'm home ..."

She met him in the hall,

"You have a visitor"

"Who?" He asked walking into the kitchen.

There was a tall young lady in a nice summer dress. She had long curls and she was drinking a glass of iced tea. When she stood he recognized her.

"Wendy? Oh Wendy you look different from the last time that I saw you"

He didn't know whether to hug her or shake her hand but she solved the problem with a hug. Britney said that she had something to do and with a questioning look to Dave she left the room.

"I'm glad to see you Mr. Kelly" she said tentatively. She didn't really know what her reception would be like here today.

"I'm glad to see you too Miss Hamilton? ... Daniels? ... Bryon? ... Whoever you are ... Wendy I'm really sorry for causing all of this trouble ... I wished that I could take it back ..."

"Oh Dave you didn't do anything wrong, it's not your fault, it's not anyone's fault but it's done now"

"So what brings you here today? ... maybe I should ask if your grandparents know that you're here?"

"I came here because I didn't know where else to go. I have to talk to someone or go crazy. My grandparents don't know that I'm here. They think that I'm at the library working on a school paper. I figured that a straight arrow G-Man like you will tell them about our visit so it was a trade off. I decided that the rewards were worth more than the consequences."

"So how is life with the Bryon's?"

"Well their really nice people who mean well and they treat me well and ... and ... it's It's just awful. I have my birth mothers old bedroom. It's exactly the same as it was when she bailed on them the night that she turned eighteen. That's right. She left at midnight when she turned eighteen. She didn't want to live with them one minute longer than she had too. They're always telling me the mistakes that she made and how they had tried to protect her from the big bad world. She was a bad student and I'm a good student but they have to protect me from the bad old world. A boy asked me to the fall dance but I can't go because my mother wasn't allowed to date in high school because there were bad people out there. I tried out for the school play and I got a good part but I can't do it because the rehearsal is after school and guess what ... bad things happen after school. I'm going to be sixteen before next summer and dad was going to give me his pickup, I was going to take real flying lessons next spring and I might catch the Montana State

record Cutthroat next summer. Oh no, I forgot, bad thing might happen to me if I did any of those things”

Dave watched this tall freckle faced girl who had been so steely that day ... she had sat on a cushion so she could see out the windshield of a two tons of airplane that she flew at a hundred miles an hour, seventy five feet above the hard Montana prairie and forty feet from a mad bomber armed with a pistol. When I was shot and laying on my face she calmly landed the plane of a gravel road that was about as wide as our driveway.

Finally, Wendy sighed and said,

“670 is the magic number”

“What’s 670?”

“The number of days until I’m eighteen, maybe the best thing about being Mary Lou Bryon instead of Susan Daniels is that she was born in March instead of May so I’ll be eighteen two months earlier then before”

They chatted for a while and the girl seemed better. Britney came back in and they had another glass of iced tea then Wendy looked at her watched and stood to leave.

“How did you get here Wendy” Dave asked.

“On the city bus”

“Come on, we’ll give you a ride back. Do you want to go to the library or to your grandparent’s home?”

“Let get it over with, take me to their house and I’ll introduce you. After you leave they’ll tell me what a bad person I am and how lucky I am not to have been hurt by bad people on the bus”

Britney went with them and they all went to the door together. Dave introduced himself with several references to the FBI and he assured them that their granddaughter was a fine person and the she deserved every chance to excel. He left Frank Bryon his business card and he wrote his home phone number and address on the back.

When they started to leave Wendy hugged Britney and whispered something into her ear. As they drove away Dave asked what the girl had told her.

“Just girl talk”

“I never know what that means”

“That’s because you’re not a girl, do you think that there’s a happy ending to this?”

“I hope so but I don’t know what it is”

“She still has a crush on you”

A few days later Dave got a call at work from Frank Byron.

“Mr. Kelly, I think that we should have a private talk. You seem to care about my granddaughter and I would like to ask you some questions.”

Dave suggested that they meet at Franks home but he declined. They finally decided on lunch near the FBI building.

“Mr. Kelly as much as I hate to admit this, Marge and I were total failures as parents raising our daughter. We tried to keep her safe and to provide a good home life but after she became a teenager she hated everything that we did. She was angry that we didn’t let her date. We said that she could bring her friends home with her and she tried it once. The boy that she brought home was completely unsuitable. He was slovenly and uncouth. When we suggested that she could do much better, she said that we wouldn’t ever see any other of her friends. As a young girl she got good grades but when our problems started her grades dropped. It was as if she did it on purpose, like she wanted to punish us.

She left home at eighteen and dropped out of school. I was called to the police station one night after she had been arrested for indecent exposure. She and a boy were found late at night frolicking naked in a fountain in the park. She wouldn’t give the police my name but they found it through the address on her driver’s licenses.

We knew that she was on drugs and was involved with several boys. She was arrested several times and then we heard through a friend that she was pregnant. We couldn’t let her keep taking drugs while the baby was developing and we were very afraid that she would have an abortion so we called the police and said that she had stolen money from us. We made it sound bad enough that the judge gave her a year in jail. That was just what we wanted to keep the baby safe. When the baby was born we got custody and when she got out of jail we got a restraining order to keep her away. As you know when Mary Lou was nearly three, our daughter took her from us and disappeared. We had given up hope of ever seeing them again.

Now we have our granddaughter back and she’s doing the same things that her mother did. She wasn’t here a week when she told us that a boy had asked her to a dance. When we told her that she was too young to date she asked how old she had to be. When I said that she would have to be out of high school, she laughed and asked if I was kidding.

Without asking, she tried out for the school play and got a part. She assumed that it was ok but we explained that she shouldn’t be out after school. She was very polite, she’s always very polite, she asked if I would give her a list of things that she could do.

Her mother was a terrible liar and Mary is just like her. She has told me some whoppers. She said that in Montana she was allowed to drive a truck and even, now get this, she was allowed to fly an airplane.”

Dave had heard enough, he was afraid of spoiling his rapport with this guy but Wendy deserved more than this.

“Mr. Bryon, what were your goals for your granddaughter?”

“Well, like everyone else, we wanted her to be happy and grow up and have a family of her own”

“How did you see her having her own family?”

“The usual way, by meeting a nice boy, getting married and having children, do you see a problem in that?”

“No, not at all but where is she going to meet Mr. Right?”

“In church or perhaps in college”

“I see, now you don’t allow her to do any after school activities like the school play or athletics do you?”

“I told you that we don’t want her to be unsupervised after school until she’s older”

“Ok, just one more question, did you teach your daughter to drive a car?”

“Of course not, she had no need to drive”

“Ok Mr. Bryon, what I’m going to say may make you angry but someone has to make a point to you before you send your granddaughter down the same path that your daughter took.

By what you have told me you wanted your daughter to be an observer as opposed to an activist. Wendy was never told that she couldn’t do something. She was allowed to try everything. What I’m going to tell you now is the absolute truth. Britney and I spent several days with your granddaughter in September. We were on a fishing trip with her and her father to a lake high in the mountains of Montana.

One morning she showed me where to catch several really big trout, then when we went back to eat she took a 410 shotgun out to a meadow behind our lodge and shot several fat mountain grouse for our lunch which she prepared. She took us for a tour of the area in a beat up old jeep which she drove. A couple of days later when I faced an emergency, with no problems or hesitation, she piloted a Cessna 185 float plane, like a sea plane, from the lake to a location about a hundred miles away and made an emergency landing on a narrow gravel road. I can’t tell you the nature of this flight because it had to do with official FBI business but if it were made public your granddaughter would be hailed as a hero.

You said that your daughter made good grades until you closed her into a box. Wendy gets excellent grades now, when I saw her last week she told me that there were 670 days left until her eighteenth birthday. I’ll bet that your daughter counted the days before she could get away from you. Wendy’s counting right now.

The way that I see it Mr. Bryon, there are two paths that Wendy can go down. One path will surly lead to her departure from your life on her eighteenth birthday and I guarantee that you will never see or hear from her again.

The other leads to a happy relationship with this beautiful and talented girl that will keep you in her life as her grandpa but not her parent because she already has parents of her own choosing. Holiday visits and summer vacations will be there for the rest of your life.

What do you think that this little sweetheart can achieve in your lifetime? Doctor, lawyer, airline pilot, Governor of Montana, kindergarten teacher, wife, mother, the first woman on Mars? She could be any of these and ten thousand things more. She's the real deal Mr. Bryon and you have to decide if you're going along for the ride"

Hamilton Ranch house October 18, 2001 6:18 pm

Molly was just setting the table when she heard the phone ring,

"Can you get that Rex, my hands are full"

"Hello, this is Rex?"

"Mr. Hamilton, this is Frank Bryon and we need to talk ..."

And what of the rest?

With her grandparents blessing, Mary Lou Bryon legally changed her name to Wendy (no middle initial) Hamilton on her eighteenth birthday. Rex and Molly adopted Wendy the same day.

Rosie and Steve Bowman became the proud parents of two boys, one born in 1996 and the youngest in 1998. Rosie never did use her Art History degree.

The US government returned \$899,900 to the Bank of Kuwait in 2003 to show that they were making progress in their self-declared 'War of Terrorism'. This created a problem in international banking circles because the money had already been replaced by a Swiss insurance company.

The Montana National Guard deployed to Iraq for ten months in 2004. While Rex returned home unscathed, three members of his unit were killed by a roadside bomb.

Wendy Hamilton held the Montana state record for Cutthroat trout for eleven days in 2005 before it was claimed by a client of Rex Hamilton.

After his crash, Tim Van Dam was found to be carrying a letter addressed to the President of the United States asking for better treatment for veterans of the gulf war.

Ann Brown was promoted to head librarian on the same day that her husband, Jimmy Brown was promoted to the chief of police. Ann and Jimmy never had children.

The girl talk whispered by Wendy into Britney's ears was "Why aren't you married to this lovely man?" Wendy was a bridesmaid in Dave and Britney's wedding.

Hamilton Aviation was fined by the FAA for allowing an unlicensed person to act as a pilot-in-command.

David left the FBI to become a partner in a prominent San Francisco Accounting firm.

Wendy was valedictorian of her Redrock high school class and was voted most likely to succeed by her fellow students.

Nan was never prosecuted for her misdemeanor in obtaining a birth certificate for Wendy.

In the fall of 2005, California recalled its governor, Gray Davis. Over a hundred people filed to run in the special election to fill the empty office. Although the office was won by actor turned politician Arnold Schwarzenegger, a popular alternative candidate in the Hate Ashberry district of San Francisco was Elizabeth Karma Atkins who when asked about her political adventure she said "Isn't it great to live in a country where

everything is possible, I came to California as a flower-child and now I was nearly elected governor, don't you just love it?"

End

